

DAUGHTERS OF FIRE
SYLVIE—EMILIE—OCTAVIE

RECENT FICTION

THE CHILDREN OF MEN

By EDEN PHILLPOTTS

THE BRIGHT SHAWL

By JOSEPH HERGESHIMER

GREY WETHERS

By V. SACKVILLE-WEST

SCISSORS

By CECIL ROBERTS

BABEL

By JOHN COHENOS

ACCORDING TO GIBSON

By DENIS MACRAIL

TWO SHALL BE BORN

By MARIE CONWAY OENLIE

LONDON: WILLIAM HEINEMANN, LTD.

DAUGHTERS OF FIRE

SYLVIE—EMILIE—OCTAVIE

BY

GERARD DE NERVAL

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH

BY

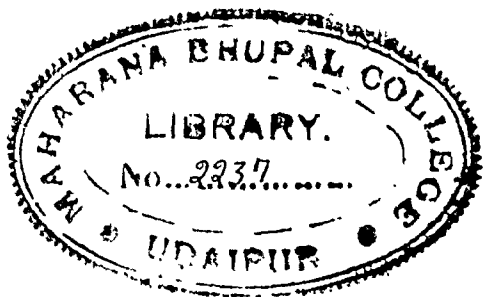
JAMES WHITALL



LONDON

WILLIAM HEINEMANN, LTD.

First published 1923



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DAUGHTERS OF FIRE

INTRODUCTION

THE writings of Gérard de Nerval (1808-1855) are seldom found upon the bookshelves of the present-day reader, and it is a pity that this should be so when one considers the importance of his place in French literature. His greatest achievements are *Les Filles du Feu*, *Le Rêve et la Vie*, and the sonnets, of which *El Desdichado*, *Arthémise* and *Myrtho* are the best known. The profound influence of these sonnets upon the poetry of France is now admitted by the best critics of that country. It may be that the writer of them died in ignorance of what he had done, but, according to Arthur Symons, he discovered "one of the foundations of what may be called the practical aesthetics of Symbolism." Mallarmé and Verlaine followed him and

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there is evidence to be found in the works of both of these poets that the glimmering torch of this man, who could himself see into the darkness, had preceded them like a will-o'-the-wisp. Gérard's whole life was a web of dreams and realities, and indeed his contemporaries, the Romantics, saw more of the visionary than of the man of letters in him. His discreet voice was scarcely heard then, for his words fell upon ears that were unprepared, and he felt that beauty was far too mysterious a thing to be comprehended by the crowd. Gérard's dreams, as he says, overflowed into his real life, and it was not during his periods of sanity but in those of madness that he produced his finest work.

He wandered the streets of Paris, travelled to the East, and made several visits to Germany. His resting places were asylums, police stations, and rooms shared with eccentric friends, and the tragedy with which he ended his life occurred in the *rue de la Vieille Lanterne*, where his body was found one morn-

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ing suspended from an iron railing. He had been carrying about with him an apron string, which he thought was the garter of the Queen of Sheba, and it was with this that he hanged himself. Gérard's friends' eccentricities were carefully thought out, but he himself did not pose and the incident in the *Palais-Royal* was simply the beginning of one of his attacks of madness ; he was found leading a lobster by a blue ribbon, because, he said, " it does not bark and knows the secrets of the sea."

It is a delightful experience to read a piece of Gérard's prose, not only because it flows in such a pleasing rhythm, but because it is always an unconscious revelation rather than a studied exposition of his emotions ; and the voice that was lost in the lyrical tumult of his time now rises from his pages with a penetrating sweetness which those of his contemporaries did not possess. To attempt a translation of three stories from *Les Filles du Feu* requires a certain amount of courage, especially in the case of *Sylvie*, and the mere thought of

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such a thing may distress those who are familiar with that delicate tissue of youthful memories. But from the moment of my first reading this labour became inevitable, and if I have preserved in the pages that follow even a few faintly heard echoes of that rare music, I shall feel that my time has not been ill spent, and that no one can accuse me of unfaithfulness. My hopes of presenting to my readers as captivating a Sylvie as Gérard's soon faded away, and I have often turned from my table in despair, allowing my thoughts to be carried off in the gentle current of his phrases to a time almost a hundred years ago when the little Parisian first gazed upon Adrienne, or perhaps one should say, when his mind became possessed by the vision he had of her.

Sylvie was written during those tense feverish months, just before Gérard's death, when his genius was at its highest point; he undoubtedly realized that darkness might come down upon him again at any moment, and that he had only a limited time in which to

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accomplish what he must have known would be his masterpiece ; he succeeded in giving us not only his masterpiece, but also the key to his wayward fantastic existence.

The appearance—or it may have been only the vision—of Adrienne, that first unforgettable moment when the bewitchment of Poetry and Love fell upon him, was the divine experience of Gérard's youth, and to return to his beloved Valois while engaged in writing *Sylvie* was to return to Adrienne. The greater part of the story is concerned with Sylvie, but that other almost symbolic figure lurks behind every phrase, and the actress Aurelia (Jenny Colon), in whom Gérard thought he saw a resemblance to his Ideal, strikes the minor note for his opening pages and for his conclusion.

I have said that *Sylvie* gives the key to its author's existence, and there may be a desire on the part of some to know to what extent the story is autobiographical ; but this curiosity, if it is felt, can only be partially satisfied. It is

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fairly certain that there is no pure invention in it, but we must remember that *Sylvie* is a poet's presentment of the episodes of his youth, and that the intervening years may have confused the outlines of the silhouettes cast by these events upon his memory. One of his biographers, Aristide Marie, says : " It is all done with miraculous art, in the purest and most musical language—an unrestrained revelation of his divine soul. The melody flows smoothly, undisturbed by sharp accents, and one is only conscious of an imperceptible note of sorrow, saddening here and there this swan-song, and tinging with ineffable melancholy the poet's last smile at the beauty of this world."

Sylvie and *Oclavie* are both in great part autobiographical, and they are both examples of Gérard's finest manner. *Emilie* makes quite a different appeal and proves him to be a story-teller as well as a composer of word-music. In all three stories we are conscious of a slight chronological confusion ; Gérard

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often seems to have difficulty in dealing with time and place, but it must be borne in mind that his eyes were almost continually fixed upon the unknown ; the past and the future were always with him, and it was only through contact with normal people that he was able to lay hold upon the present. During his moments of sanity he was always peering out of the real world into the darkness which so frequently enveloped him. Sleep was possible only during the day, and at night he wandered the streets, his restless feet in constant motion. Perhaps he thought the wanderings of his mind could be checked in this fashion.

Le Rêve et la Vie, his last work, was written when he was considered by the world in general to be actually mad, and it is a narrative of madness from the pen of the madman himself. The concluding fragments of it were found in his pockets after his death, written upon crumpled bits of paper, and interspersed with cabalistic signs and strange geometrical demonstrations. Théophile

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Gautier finds in it, " cold reason seated by the bedside of hot fever, hallucination analysing itself by a supreme philosophic effort."

Jenny Colon, the actress who was the object of Gérard's sane adoration, had died, and her spirit was his constant companion till the end of his life. When the fact of her death penetrated his confused mind, he said in a letter to a friend, " I am now certain of the existence of another world where lovers meet. She is much more mine in death than she was in life." *Le Rêve et la Vie* is the record of his communion with the spirit of Jenny Colon, and to read it is to realize that from the moment of her death Gérard's pilgrimages into the world of darkness behind the stars were more than vague wanderings ; there was a new figure in his country of dreams, frequently caught sight of, but always, as he says, " as though lit up by a lightning-flash, pale and dying, hurried away by dark horsemen."

On that evening of mist and moonlight in

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Gérard's childhood, Adrienne floated in and out of his vision, and all his subsequent loves, whether of this world or not—Jenny Colon, or Sylvie, or Isis, or the Queen of Sheba—were merely reincarnations. Adrienne remained the supreme inspiration of his life: the divine spectre of ever-changing form who led him through the fatal labyrinth of madness. He listened to the "secret voices of Nature," and, though a captive upon earth, "held conversation with the starry choir." His eyes rested upon strange things, strange music fell upon his ears, and there were times when he was blinded by the light that flowed in upon him from behind the world, but he was able to set down upon paper the materializations of the sights and sounds that came to him. And he it was who first divined that words could be used symbolically, that they might be made directly to suggest beauty, not merely its reflection or its praise, but beauty itself intangible and mysterious.

J. W.

SYLVIE

SYLVIE

I

LEISURE NIGHTS

I LEFT the theatre where I sat every evening in a stage box, dressed with the elegance and care befitting my hopes. Sometimes the house was full, and sometimes empty, but it mattered little to me whether my eyes rested upon thirty or forty deadheads in the pit and upon boxes filled with old-time caps and dresses, or whether I found myself part of an enthusiastic audience, crowding every tier with colour and the gleam of jewels. The stage awakened my interest no more than did the house, except, during the second and third scene of the tiresome play, when a vivid appearance illuminated the empty spaces, and, with a breath and a word, summoned the shadowy figures of the actors back to life.

I felt that I lived in her, and that she lived

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only for me. Her smile filled me with infinite contentment, and the resonance of her voice, now soft, now vibrating with emotion, made me tremble with joy and love. She understood all my enthusiasms and whims ; for me she possessed every perfection—radiant as the day, when the footlights shone upon her from below, pale as the night, when the footlights were turned down and the rays of the chandelier showed her simple beauty against a curtain of shadows, like one of the divine Hours carved on the sombre background of the frescoes of Herculaneum.

For a year it had not entered my mind to find out what her life away from the theatre might be, and I was loth to disturb the magic mirror that held her image. I may have listened to idle speculations about her private life, but my interest in it was no greater than in the prevailing rumours about the Princess of Elis or the Queen of Trebizond, for one of my uncles who had lived in the eighteenth century had warned me in good time that an

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actress was not a woman and that Nature had forgotten to give her a heart. Of course he meant those of his own time, but he recounted so many of his illusions and his deceptions, and he showed me so many portraits on ivory—charming medallions which now adorned his snuff-boxes—so many faded letters and ribbons, each the token of a disappointment, that I had fallen into the habit of mistrusting them all.

We were in the midst of strange years then, years like those that generally follow a revolution or the decline of a great empire. There was none of the noble gallantry of the Fronde, the polite vice of the Regency, or the scepticism and mad orgies of the Directorate ; we lived in a confusion of activity, hesitation, and indolence, of dazzling Utopias, of philosophical or religious aspirations, of vague enthusiasms mingled with certain impulses towards a renewal of life, of weariness at the thought of past discord, of unformulated hopes—it was something like the epochs of Peregrinus and

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Apuleius. We looked for new birth from the bouquet of roses that the beautiful Isis would bring us ; and at night the young and pure goddess appeared, and we were stricken with shame for the daylight hours we wasted. But ambition had no part in our life, for the greedy race for position and honours had closed to us all possible paths to activity. Our only refuge from the multitude was that Ivory Tower of the poets which we were always climbing higher and higher. Upon these heights whither our masters led us, we breathed at last the pure air of solitude, we drank forgetfulness from the golden cup of legend, and we were intoxicated with poetry and love. Love, alas! vague figures, tinges of blue and rose, spectral abstractions! Intimacies with women offended our ingenuousness, and it was our rule to look upon them as Goddesses or Queens, and above all never to approach them.

But there were some of our number nevertheless who thought little of these platonic sublimities, and sometimes amid our dreams

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borrowed from Alexandria they shook the smouldering torch of subterranean gods, and sent a trail of sparks through the darkness. Thus on leaving the theatre, my soul full of the sadness of a fading vision, I was glad to avail myself of the society of a club where many were supping and where melancholy yielded to the unfailing warmth of certain brilliant spirits whose ardour and passion often rendered them sublime—such people as one always meets during periods of renovation or decadence—people whose discussions often reached a point where the more timid amongst us would go to the windows to make certain that the Huns, or the Turkomanians, or the Cossacks, had not arrived at last to put an end to rhetoric and sophism. “Let us drink, let us love, that is wisdom!” was the only opinion of the youths among them, and it was one of these who said to me :

“I’ve been meeting you in the same theatre now for a long time, I always find you there. For whom do you go?” For whom? . . . It

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had never occurred to me that one could go there for another. However, I mentioned a name.

“ Well,” said my friend, indulgently, “ there’s the happy man who has just taken her home and who, faithful to the laws of our club, will probably not see her again until to-morrow morning.”

Without showing too much interest, I turned and saw a young man of the world, faultlessly attired, with a pale, expectant face and eyes full of a gentle sadness. He was sitting at a whist-table, where he threw down his gold and lost it heedlessly.

“ What does he matter to me ? ” I said, “ or any other ? There had to be some one, and he seems worthy of her choice.”

“ And you ? ”

“ Me ? I’m following a likeness, nothing more.”

I went out through the reading-room and instinctively picked up a newspaper ; I think I wanted to see how the market was going, for

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after the wreck of my fortune there remained a considerable sum in foreign shares, and a rumour was afloat that the property was at last going to amount to something. A ministry had just fallen and the quotation was very high; I was rich once more.

Only one thought arose out of this turn in my affairs: the woman I had loved for so long was mine for the asking; my ideal was within reach. Surely I was deluding myself with a mocking misprint? But all the newspapers contained the same quotation, and my winnings rose up before me like the golden statue of Moloch. What would that young man say now, I wondered, if I were to take possession of the woman he had forsaken? . . . I trembled at the thought and then my pride asserted itself. No! at my age one does not put an end to love with money; I will not be a seducer. After all, the times have changed, and how do I know she is mercenary?

My eyes ran vaguely over the newspaper I was still holding, and I read these two lines :

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“ *Fête du Bouquet Provincial*. To-morrow the archers of Senlis will present the bouquet to those of Loisy.” These simple words awakened in me an entirely new train of thought ; memories of the province forgotten long ago, distant echoes of the care-free festivals of youth. The horn and the drum sounded far away in the hamlets and in the forests ; maidens were weaving garlands, and they sang as they sorted out the bouquets tied with ribbons. A heavy wagon drawn by oxen passed by to receive these gifts, and we, the children of the country, took our places in the procession, knights by virtue of our bows and arrows, unaware then that we were but repeating through the years a druidic festival that would outlive monarchies and new religions.

II

ADRIENNE

I WENT to bed but found no rest; and as I lay there between sleeping and waking, memories of my childhood thronged about me. In this state, where the mind still resists the fantastic combinations of dreams, the important happenings of a long period of one's life often crowd themselves into a few moments.

The picture rose up in my mind of a château of the time of Henry IV, with its pointed slate roofs, its reddish front and yellowed stonework, and its wide enclosure edged by elms and lindens whose foliage scattered golden shafts of sunlight upon the smooth green surface. Maidens danced in a ring on the grass, and they sang old melodies, handed down to them by their mothers, with an accent so unaffectedly pure that one seemed

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to be actually living in that old Valois country where the heart of France beat for more than a thousand years.

I was the only boy at this dance and I had taken Sylvie with me, a little girl from the next hamlet. She was so alive and so fresh, with her black eyes, her clearly cut profile and delicately tanned complexion! . . . I loved no one but her, I had eyes for no one else—until then! . . . I saw a tall and beautiful light-haired girl in the ring where we were dancing, one whom they called Adrienne. All at once, by the rules of the dance, we found ourselves alone in the middle of the ring. We were of the same height; we were told to kiss each other, and the dancing and singing became livelier than ever. . . . I pressed her hand when I kissed her, and I felt the light touch of long golden ringlets upon my cheeks. From that moment a strange uneasiness took possession of me.

Adrienne had to sing that she might have the right to rejoin the dance. We sat in a

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circle about her and she began at once in the clear and delicately modulated voice peculiar to the young girls of that misty country. Her song was one of those old-time ballads, full of passionate sadness, that always tell of the misfortunes of a princess imprisoned in her tower for having loved. At the end of each stanza the melody passed into one of those quivering trills that young throats can make so much of, when, by means of a restrained shudder, they simulate the trembling voices of their grandmothers.

Twilight came down from the great trees around us as the song drew to a close, and the light of the rising moon fell upon her, alone in the midst of our listening circle ; then she stopped and none of us dared to break the silence. A faint white mist spread itself over the lawn and rested upon the tips of the grass ; we thought ourselves in Paradise. . . . At last I got up and ran to where there were some laurels planted in tall earthenware vases, and brought back two branches which had been

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woven into a crown and tied with ribbon. I placed this ornament upon Adrienne's head, and its shiny foliage caught the pale gleam of the moon. She was like Dante's Beatrice smiling at him as he wandered on the borders of Heaven.

Then she got up, and making us a graceful curtsey, which showed us her slender figure, she ran across the lawn into the château. They said she was the granddaughter of one of the descendants of a family related to the ancient kings of France ; the blood of the Valois ran in her veins. For this day of festivities she had been allowed to join in our games, but we were not to see her again, for she was returning the following morning to her convent school.

Sylvie was crying when I returned to her, and I found that the reason for her tears was the crown I had given to Adrienne. I offered to get her another but she refused, saying she was unworthy of it. I tried to defend myself, but she did not speak to me again that evening.

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When I returned to Paris to continue my studies, my mind was divided between a tender friendship that had come to an end, and a vague, impossible love enveloping me with painful thoughts which a schoolboy's philosophy was powerless to disperse.

But Adrienne triumphed in the end—a mirage of beauty and nobility, that lightened or shared the severity of my studies. During the next summer's holiday I learned that, in obedience to her family's wishes, she had entered the convent.

III

RESOLUTION

EVERYTHING was made clear to me by this half-dreamed memory. This unreasonable and hopeless love I had conceived for an actress, that took possession of me every evening at the time of the play, only to set me free at bedtime, had its origin in the memory of Adrienne, a flower of the night that opened to the pale moon, a youthful apparition, half-bathed in mist, gliding across the grass. The almost-forgotten features were now singularly clear, and it was as though a pencil sketch, dimmed by time, had become a painting ; first the master's rough study and then the splendid finished picture.

To love a nun in the guise of an actress ! And what if they were one and the same ! That possibility leads to madness, but it is an inevitable impulse—the unknown beckons

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like the will-o'-the-wisp fading through the rushes in a still pool.—But we must cling to realities.

Why have I forgotten Sylvie for so long, Sylvie whom I loved so well? She was such a pretty little girl, much the prettiest in Loisy. Surely she is still there, as innocent and as good as she was then. I can see her window now, framed by creepers and roses, and the cage of warblers hanging on the left; I can hear her whirring spindle and she is singing her favourite song:

Le belle était assise

Près du ruisseau coulant . . .

She is still waiting for me. Who would have married her? She was so poor! There were only peasants in Loisy and the neighbouring hamlets, rough fellows with toil-worn hands and thin, sunburnt faces, so when I came to visit my uncle who lived near by, she loved *me*, a little Parisian. My poor uncle is dead now and for the last three years I have

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been lavishly spending the modest legacy he left me, and it might have been enough for the rest of my life. With Sylvie I would have saved it, and now Chance brings to my mind this opportunity before it is too late.

What is she doing at this moment ? She is asleep—no, she cannot be, for to-day is the Festival of the Bow, the only one of the year when they dance the night through. . . . She is at the dance.

What time is it now ?

I had no watch, and my gaze wandered over the extravagant collection of furniture with which an old-fashioned apartment is usually given its proper atmosphere. My Renaissance clock of tortoiseshell surpassed all the other objects with its quiet richness. A gilded dome, surmounted by the figure of Time, is supported by caryatids of the Medici period upon half-rampant horses, and Diana, leaning upon her stag, is in bas-relief beneath a dial inlaid with enamelled figures of the hours. But I did not buy this clock in Touraine that

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I might know the time, and, though an excellent one, it has probably not been wound up for two centuries.

I went downstairs, saying to myself that I could get to Loisy in four hours. The porter's clock struck one as I passed out into the Place du Palais-Royal, where there were still four or five cabs waiting, no doubt, for fares from the clubs and gambling houses. I mentioned my destination to the nearest driver.

"And where is that?" he asked.

"Near Senlis, about twenty miles."

"I will take you to the post-house," he said, less absorbed than I.

How dreary the Flanders road is at night, until it enters the forest! Always the double rows of trees, monotonous and vague in the mist; meadows and ploughed land to right and left, with the grey hills of Montmorency, Ecouen and Luzarches beyond. And then comes the dreary market town of Gonesse with its streets of the League and the Fronde, but, here, there is a short cut to the

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villages where I have often seen apple blossoms shining through the darkness like stars of the earth. While my carriage slowly ascends the hill, let me try to call those happy days to life.

IV

TO THE ISLAND OF VENUS

SEVERAL years had passed, and already my meeting with Adrienne in front of the château was no more than a memory of youth. I had been at Loisy on the patron saint's day and took my accustomed place among the Knights of the Bow. Some young people from the dilapidated châteaux in the neighbouring forests arranged the festival, and from Chantilly, Compiègne, and Senlis joyous companies came trooping to join the rural cavalcade. After the long walk through towns and villages, and when mass was over and the prizes for the sports had been awarded, a banquet for the prize-winners was held on an island, covered with poplars and lindens, in one of the lakes fed by the Nonette and the Thève. Barges adorned with flowers carried us to this island, chosen for its oval temple

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which was to serve as banqueting hall. There are many of those delicate structures thereabouts, built by rich philosophers towards the end of the eighteenth century. I think this temple must have been originally dedicated to Urania. Three of the pillars had fallen, carrying a part of the architrave with them, but the fragments had been cleared away and garlands were hung between the remaining pillars ; such was the restoration of this modern ruin, for which the paganism of Boufflers or Chaulieu was responsible rather than that of Horace.

It may be that the crossing of the lake had been devised to call up the memory of Watteau's *Voyage à Cythere*, and the illusion was complete but for our modern costumes. The great bouquet of the festival was taken from the wagon that carried it and placed in one of the largest barges, the customary escort of little girls in white dresses took seats around it, and this graceful procession, recreated from that of another day, was mirrored in the calm

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waters that lay between it and the island. The thickets of thorn, the colonnade and the brilliant foliage glowed red in the afternoon sun, and when all the barges had landed and the bouquet had been carried ceremoniously to the centre of the table, we took our places, the more fortunate of the boys sitting next to the girls. To obtain this favour it was only necessary to be known to their families, and I managed to sit by Sylvie, for her brother and I had been together in the procession. He reproached me for never coming to see them and I spoke of my studies which kept me in Paris, assuring him that this time I had come especially to pay them a visit.

“No, he’s forgotten me,” Sylvie said. “We’re village people and Paris is so far above us!”

I wanted to close her mouth with a kiss, but she kept on pouting until her brother intervened and she offered me her cheek in a very half-hearted fashion. It was the sort of kiss she had often given to others and I did not

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enjoy it, for in that old country, where one speaks to everybody, a kiss is no more than a politeness among well-mannered people.

The directors of the festival had arranged a surprise for us, and when the banquet was over, a wild swan rose up out of the depths of the basket where it had been confined beneath the flowers. Wreaths and garlands were lifted upon its strong wings and they fell all about us, and each boy took possession of one of them for the adornment of his companion's brow, while the swan took joyous flight towards the glow of the sinking sun. It was my good fortune to get one of the finest of these wreaths, and this time Sylvie was smiling when I kissed her, so the memory of that other day was blotted out. My admiration of her now was complete, for she had become so beautiful. She was no longer the little village girl whom I had scorned when my eyes fell upon another, taller and more used to the manners of the world. She had improved in every possible way : the spell of her black

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eyes, so captivating even as a little child, had now become irresistible ; there was a gleam of Attic intelligence in her smile when its quick light spread over her calm regular features—a face that might have been painted by an old master. With her white, well-rounded arms, her long delicate hands, and her slender figure, she was no longer the Sylvie I had known, and I could not help telling her how changed I found her, in the hope that she would forget my former faithlessness.

Every circumstance was in my favour ; I had the friendship of her brother, the atmosphere of the festival was alluring, and the time and place for this echo of a gay ceremonial of bygone days had been chosen with tasteful discrimination. We escaped from the dance as soon as we could, that we might talk of our childhood, and dream together as we watched the sunlight fading from the foliage and the still surface of the lake ; but Sylvie's brother put an end to our meditations, telling us the time had come to go back to Loisy.

V

THE VILLAGE

I LEFT them at the old guard house at Loisy, and returned to my uncle with whom I was staying at Montagny. Turning from the road to go through the little wood between Loisy and Saint S——, I soon found myself following the deep path that skirts the forest of Ermenonville, expecting every moment to come upon the convent walls which would cause me to go more than half a mile out of my way. Every now and then the moon was hidden by clouds, and I had great difficulty in avoiding the grey rocks and the tufts of sweet heather on both sides of the way. The path branched neither to the right nor to the left, and great druidic boulders rose up out of the thick forest, where the memory of the sons of Armen, who were killed by the Romans, is still lurking. The distant lakes

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looked like mirrors set in the misty plain, but I could not tell which one had been the scene of the festival.

The soft air was laden with the perfume of the wood, and I decided to go no farther, but to sleep till morning on a bed of sweet heather. When I awoke, the outlines of my surroundings were just visible. To the left, the walls of the Convent of Saint S—— stretched away into the mist, and across the valley I saw the ridge of the Gens-d'Armes and the jagged remains of the old Carlovingian dwelling. Then came Thiers Abbey, high above the tree tops, its crumbling walls, pierced by trefoils and pointed arches, silhouetted against the sky ; and beyond, the moated manor of Pontarmé had just caught the first rays of the sun. To the south rose up the high turret of La Tournelle, and on the first slopes of Montméliant I saw the four towers of Bertrand-Fosse.

My thoughts were held captive by the memory of the day before, and I thought only

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of Sylvie. Nevertheless, the appearance of the convent forced the idea into my mind that perhaps Adrienne was within. The tolling of the morning bell, which had undoubtedly awakened me, was still in my ears, and I was suddenly possessed by the desire to climb upon the highest rock that I might look into the enclosure, but a moment's hesitation kept me from this as from a profanation. With the fullness of daylight this futile memory vanished from my mind, and I saw only the pink cheeks of Sylvie.

"Why not awaken her myself," I said, and I started off along the path that skirts the wood towards Loisy : twenty thatched cottages festooned with vines and climbing roses. Some spinners, their hair tied in red handkerchiefs, were already at work, but Sylvie was not among them. Her people were still peasants, but Sylvie had become a young lady now that she was engaged in making fine laces. . . . I went up to her room without shocking anyone, and found her already at work plying

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her bobbins, which clicked gently against the green frame upon her knees.

“ You lazy thing,” she said, smiling adorably, “ I believe you’re only just out of bed ! ”

I told her how I had passed the night, of my wanderings through the woods and among the rocks, and she replied half indulgently, “ I hope you’re not too tired for another ramble, because we’re going to see my great-aunt at Othys.”

I had scarcely time to answer before she gleefully abandoned her work, arranged her hair before a mirror and put on a rough straw hat. Her eyes were bright with innocent pleasure as we set out, first following the banks of the Thève, then through a meadow full of daisies and buttercups and on into Saint-Laurent wood. Every now and then we leapt over streams and broke through thickets in order to shorten our way. Blackbirds whistled in the trees above us, and tomtits darted exultingly from the nearest bushes.

At our feet there was periwinkle, so dear to

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Rousseau, opening its blue flowers upon sprays of paired leaves, and Sylvie was careful not to crush them, but memories of the philosopher of Geneva did not interest her for she was hunting for strawberries. I spoke to her of *La Nouvelle Héloïse* and recited several passages I knew by heart.

“Is it good?” she asked.

“It is sublime!”

“Better than Auguste Lafontaine?”

“There is more tenderness in it.”

“Oh, well,” she said, “I must read it then. I’ll tell my brother to get it for me the next time he goes to Senlis.” Then I recited some more passages while she gathered her strawberries.

VI

OTHYS

AS we emerged from the wood we came upon a great clump of purple foxglove, and when Sylvie had picked an armful of it she told me it was for her aunt. "She loves to have these beautiful flowers in her bedroom."

There remained only a bit of level field to cross before reaching Othys, and we could see the village steeple against the bluish hills that rise from Montméliant to Dammartin. Now there fell upon our ears the pleasant rustling sound of the Thève flowing in its bed of sandstone and flint. The river was narrow here, for its source, a tiny lake enclosed by gladioli and iris, lay close by in the meadow's sleepy embrace. We soon came to the outskirts of the village where Sylvie's aunt had a little thatched cottage built of rough sandstone blocks hidden beneath trellis work that

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supported wild grape and hop vines ; she lived on the produce of a small piece of land the village people had worked for her since her husband's death. At her niece's arrival the cottage seemed at once to be full of commotion.

" Good-morning, Auntie! Here are your children!" cried Sylvie, " and we're dreadfully hungry! "

It was only after kissing her affectionately and placing the bunch of foxgloves in her arms that it occurred to her to introduce me: " He is my sweetheart ! " And when I too had kissed her, she said :

" What a fine young fellow—and fair hair too! "

" He's got nice soft hair," Sylvie added.

" It won't last," the old woman said, " but you've got plenty of time, and your dark hair goes well with his."

" We must give him some breakfast," announced Sylvie, and she brought brown bread, milk and sugar from the cupboard, and

spread out on the table some earthenware plates and platters with flowers and bright-feathered cocks upon them in large design. A Creil bowl of strawberries, floating in milk, went in the centre, and when several handfuls of cherries and currants had been brought in from the garden, Sylvie placed a vase of flowers at either end of the tablecloth. But her aunt, who was not to be outdone, objected: "This is all very nice, but it's only dessert. You must let me do something now," and taking down the frying-pan, she threw a faggot on the fire. Sylvie wanted to help her, but she was firm. "You mustn't touch this ; those pretty fingers are for making lace, finer lace than they make at Chantilly! I know, because you once gave me some."

"Yes, I know, Auntie. But tell me, have you got any old bits? I can use them for models if you have."

"Go upstairs and see what you can find; perhaps there are some in my chest of drawers!"

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"But the keys, Auntie!"

"Nonsense! The drawers are open."

"It's not true; there's one that's always locked," and while the old woman was cleaning the frying-pan, Sylvie snatched a little key of wrought steel from its place at her belt and waved it at me triumphantly.

Then she ran quickly up the wooden staircase leading to the bedroom, and I followed her. Oh, sacred Youth! Oh, sacred Old Age! Who could have dreamed of such an intrusion into that innermost sanctuary where the memory of a first love lay carefully guarded? At the head of the rough bedstead, a young man with black eyes and red lips smiled down from an oval gilt frame. He was wearing a gamekeeper's uniform of the house of Condé, and his soldierly appearance, rosy cheeks and finely modelled forehead beneath his powdered hair had cast upon this otherwise commonplace portrait the spell of youthful grace and simplicity. Some unassuming artist, invited to the royal hunt, had done the

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best he could, and upon the opposite wall in a similar frame hung his portrait of the young wife, mischievous and inviting, in her slim, ribbon-laced bodice, coaxing a bird perched upon her finger to come still nearer. This was indeed the same person who was cooking now down there bent over the hearth, and I thought of the fairies at the *Funambules* and the shrivelled masks that concealed soft bright faces of youth until the last scene when they were cast aside and the Temple of Love gleamed beneath the magical rays of a revolving sun.

“ Oh! ” I exclaimed, “ how pretty she was! ”

“ And what about me ? ” said Sylvie, who had finally succeeded in opening the famous drawer. From it she drew a long dress of worn taffeta that crackled when she shook out the wrinkles.

“ I must try it on to see if it suits me. Oh! I’m going to look like an old-fashioned fairy! ”

“ The Fairy of Legend, forever young! ” I thought to myself ; and Sylvie unhooked her

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printed-cotton frock, letting it fall around her feet. The taffeta dress fitted her slim waist perfectly, and she told me to hook her up.

"Oh, these wide sleeves, aren't they absurd!" she cried; but their loop-shaped openings revealed her pretty bare arms, and her little white throat rose gracefully out of the faded tulle and ribbons of the bodice.

"Do finish it! Don't you know how to hook up a dress?" She reminded me of Greuze's Village Bride.

"You must have some powder," I said.

"We'll find some," and she began to rummage again in the drawers. And the treasures they contained! What delicious perfume! What a glistening of tinsel and brilliant colours: two slightly broken mother-of-pearl fans, some Chinese paste boxes, an amber necklace, and a host of other trinkets from which Sylvie extracted two little white slippers with paste buckles.

"Oh, I must wear these," she said, "and there ought to be embroidered stockings to go

with them." A moment afterwards we unrolled a pair of silk ones—delicate pink with green clocks ; but the old woman's voice and the rattling of the frying-pan below put an end to our explorations.

"Go on down," Sylvie commanded, and nothing I could say would persuade her to allow me to help with the stockings and slippers, so I went down to find the contents of the frying-pan already dished up—a rasher of bacon with fried eggs. But I soon had to mount the stairs again at Sylvie's call, and found her costume now complete.

"Dress yourself quickly," and she pointed to the gamekeeper's wedding-suit spread out on the chest. In a few moments I had become the bridegroom of a past generation. Sylvie was waiting for me on the stairs, and we descended hand-in-hand to meet the astonished gaze and the startled cry of the old woman:

"Oh, my children!" She wept first and then smiled through her tears. It was a vision of her youth, at once cruel and delightful. We

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sat gravely down beside her, but our gaiety soon returned when she began to recall the pompous festivities of her wedding. She even remembered the old part-songs that had been sung around her bridal table, and the simple epithalamium that had accompanied her return, upon her husband's arm, after the dance. We repeated these, mindful of every hiatus and assonance ; Solomon's Ecclesiastes was not more full of colour nor more amorous. And we were husband and wife for that whole lovely summer's morning.

VII

CHAÂLIS

IT is four o'clock in the morning; the road sinks down into a cut, and then rises again. The carriage will soon pass Orry, then La Chapelle. To the left there is a road that skirts the Forest of Hallate, where I went one evening with Sylvie's brother in his cart ; I think it was to some sort of festival on Saint Bartholomew's day. His pony flew over the little-used woodland roads as if bound for a witch's sabbath, until we turned through the village street at Mont-l'Évêque and, a few moments afterwards, drew up at the guard house which had once been Chaâlis Abbey . . . Chaâlis, and my mind throngs again with memories.

There is nothing of this ancient refuge of emperors left to admire except the ruins of its cloister of byzantine arches through which one

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may look out across the lakes—the forgotten relic of a holy edifice upon what used to be known as Charlemagne's farms. The Cardinals of the House of Este, owing to their long stay thereabouts at the time of the Medici, had left their mark upon the religion of that country, so far removed from the life and movement of cities, and there is still something noble and poetic in its quality and practice; in the chapels beneath delicately moulded arches, decorated by Italian artists, one breathes the perfume of the fifteenth century. Figures of saints and angels are painted in pink upon the pale blue background of the vaulting, with an appearance of pagan allegory that calls to mind the sentimentality of Petrarch and the fictitious mysticism of Francesco Colonna.

Sylvie's brother and I were intruders that evening at what turned out to be a sort of allegorical spectacle. It had been arranged by the owner of the domain, a person of noble birth, and he had invited some families of the

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neighbourhood to be his guests. Some little girls from a nearby convent were to take part in the performance, which was not a reproduction of the tragedies of Saint-Cyr, but dated back to those first lyrical experiments brought into France at the time of the Valois: a mystery play of the middle ages. The costumes worn by the actors were long robes of azure, hyacinth or gold, and the opening scene was a discourse by the angels upon the destruction of the world. They sang of its vanished glories, and the Angel of Death set forth the causes of its downfall. A spirit then rose up out of the depths, holding the Flaming Sword in its hand, and bade them bow down in admiration before the Glory of Christ, Conqueror of the regions beneath the earth. It seemed as though I were gazing upon Adrienne, transformed by the spirit's robe as she already was by her vocation, and the gilded pasteboard halo that encircled her head seemed to us quite naturally a ring of light. The range and the power of her voice had

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increased, and her singing, with its birdlike twitter of gracenotes, gave an Italian flavour to the severe phrasing of the recitative.

As I set down these words I cannot help wondering whether the events they describe actually took place or whether I have dreamed them. Sylvie's brother was a little drunk that night, for we had stopped a few moments at the guard house, where a swan with wings outspread, suspended above the door, impressed me greatly, and there were high cupboards of carved walnut, a grandfather's clock, and some trophies, bows, arrows, and a red and green marksmen's record. An odd-looking dwarf in a Chinese hat, holding a bottle in one hand and a ring in the other, seemed to be urging the marksmen to aim accurately. He was, if I am not mistaken, cut out of sheet-iron. . . . But the presence of Adrienne!—is it as clearly fixed in my mind as these details and the unquestionable existence of Chaâlis Abbey? Yet I can remember that it was the guard's son who took us into the room where

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the performance took place ; we stood near the door and I have to-day a distinct impression of the deep emotion of that numerous company seated in front of us. It was Saint Bartholomew's day, peculiarly associated with the memory of the Medici, whose coat of arms, united with that of the house of Este, decorated the old walls. . . . But perhaps, after all, that cherished appearance was only one of my obsessions, and now, happily, the carriage has stopped at the Plessis road ; I emerge from the world of dreams and it is only a quarter of an hour's walk, by a deserted path, to Loisy.

VIII

THE LOISY DANCE

I ARRIVED at the Loisy dance just at that melancholy but somehow agreeable stage when the lights begin to grow dim at the approach of dawn. The lower outlines of the lindens had sunk into obscurity and their topmost branches were blue in the half-light. The rustic flute strove but faintly now to silence the song of the nightingale, and I could hardly recognize those I knew, scattered through the pale, dishevelled groups. At last I found Lise, one of Sylvie's friends, and she kissed me, saying, "It's a long time since we've seen you, Parisian!"

"Ah, yes, a long time."

"And you've come just now?"

"By the post-coach."

"And not too quickly!"

"I wanted to see Sylvie; is she still here?"

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“ She never leaves before morning ; she adores dancing, you know.”

The next moment I saw her, and though her face looked tired, I noticed that same Attic smile as she turned her black eyes upon me. A youth standing near by withdrew with a bow; she would forego the quadrille.

It was almost broad daylight as we went out hand in hand from the dance. The flowers drooped in the loosened coils of Sylvie's hair, and petals from the bouquet at her waist fell down over the crumpled lace of her frock. I offered to take her home and we set out beneath a grey sky along the right bank of the Thève. Yellow and white water lilies bloomed in the still pools at each bend in the stream, upon a delicately embroidered background of water stars ; the meadows were dotted with sheaves and hayricks, and though their fragrance was less intoxicating than the cool scent of the woods and the thickets of flowering thorn, we followed the river path.

“ Sylvie,” I said, “ you love me no longer ! ”

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“ Ah, my dear friend,” she sighed, “ you must be reasonable; things don’t come out in life as we want them to. You once spoke to me of *La Nouvelle Héloïse*; I’ve read it now, but the first sentence that met my eyes made me shudder, ‘ Every girl who reads this book is lost.’ However, I went on with it, trusting to my own judgment. You remember the day we dressed up in the wedding clothes at my Aunt’s. In the book there were engravings of lovers in old-fashioned costumes, and when I saw *Saint-Preux* I thought of you, and I was *Julie*. Oh, if you had only been here then! But they told me you were in Italy, and I suppose you saw girls there much prettier than I am.”

“ None as beautiful as you, Sylvie, nor with such clear-cut features. You might be a nymph out of some old Legend! And our country here ; it’s just as beautiful as the Italian country; the rocks there are just as high as ours, to be sure, and a cascade falls down over them like the one at Terni, but I saw nothing there that I miss here.”

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“ And in Paris ? ”

“ In Paris ? ” I shook my head without replying, and I thought suddenly of that shadowy form that had troubled my mind for so long.

“ Sylvie,” I said, “ let’s stop here, do you mind ? ” Then I knelt at her feet, and told her of my indecision and my fickleness, while the hot tears rolled down my cheeks, and I called up the sinister apparition that haunted my life. “ Sylvie,” I sobbed, “ you must save me, for I shall always love you and no one else.”

She turned to me tenderly and was about to speak, but at that moment we were interrupted by a gay burst of laughter from some bushes behind us. It was Sylvie’s brother, who, after numerous refreshments at the dance, had come on to join us, in a state of exaltation far beyond the usual limits of country gaiety. He called to Sylvie’s admirer, who had remained behind the bushes, but who now came towards us even more unsteadily

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than his companion. He seemed more embarrassed with me than with Sylvie, and his sincere though awkward deference prevented me from bearing him any ill-will for having been the partner with whom Sylvie had stayed so late at the dance. I thought him not a very dangerous rival.

“We must go home, so good-bye for the present,” Sylvie said, and she offered me her cheek, which did not seem to offend her admirer.

IX

ERMENONVILLE

I HADN'T the slightest desire to sleep, so I went to Montagny to see my uncle's house once more. Sadness took possession of me when I caught sight of its yellow front and green shutters; everything was just as before, except that I had to go around to the farmhouse for the key, and then the shutters were thrown open, and I stood among the old bits of carefully polished furniture, all in their accustomed places : the high walnut cupboard, the two Flemish pictures, said to be the work of our artist grandfather, some large engravings after Boucher, and a series of engraved illustrations from *Emile* and *La Nouvelle Héloïse* by Moreau. The stuffed dog on the table had been my companion during his lifetime for many tramps through the woods ; he was an Italian pug, perhaps the last of that forgotten race.

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"The parrot's still alive," the farmer told me, "I've got him over at my house." And I looked out across the garden, a mass of luxuriant weeds; but over in the corner I could still see traces of the little patch that had been my own garden as a child. Trembling with emotion, I entered the study with its little bookcase of carefully chosen volumes, old friends of the man whose memory they evoked, and on his desk I saw the old Roman vases and medallions he had dug up in his garden, a small but greatly treasured collection.

"Let's see the parrot," I said, and on entering the farmhouse we could hear him demanding his lunch as stridently as ever. He turned his gaze on me and his round eye in its circle of wrinkled skin made me think of a calculating old man.

My belated visit to this well-loved spot filled me with gloomy thoughts, and I longed to see Sylvie again. Sylvie was not a memory, she was alive and young, the only person who could keep me in this country of my childhood.

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At midday I set out along the Loisy road, and since everybody would be sure to be resting after the dance, I decided to walk two miles and a half through the woods to Ermenonville. The sun scarcely penetrated the interlacing branches of the trees above me, and the forest road was as deliciously cool as an avenue in some great park. Scattered among the tall oaks were birches with their white trunks and quivering foliage ; no birds were singing, and the stillness was complete but for the tap-tap of a green woodpecker building its nest. The directions on the finger-posts were often quite illegible, and once I very nearly lost my way, but at last, leaving the *Désert* on my left, I came to the dancing-green and found the old men's bench still in existence, and I stood before this graphic realization of *Anacharsis* and of *Emile*, beset by memories of an ancient philosophy revived by the previous owner of the estate.

A little farther on when the glistening surface of a lake shone through the branches of

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the hazels and willows, I knew it was to this spot that my uncle had so often brought me. Here in a grove of pines stands the Temple of Philosophy, unhappily never completed by its founder. This unfinished structure, already in ruins, resembles the temple of the Tiburtine sybil, and upon it are the names of great thinkers, beginning with Montaigne and Descartes and ending with Rousseau; graceful strands of ivy hang down among the columns, and the steps are covered with brambles. I remember being brought here as a little child to witness the awarding of school prizes to white-robed maidens. Raspberry and dog-briars have killed the roses now; and have the laurels been cut, as they were in the song of the maidens who would not go into the wood? No, those delicate Italian shrubs could not live in our misty country, but Virgil's privet still blooms as if to emphasize his words inscribed above the door: *Rerum cognoscere causas!* Yes, this temple is falling away like so many others; tired and forgetful men will pass it

by unnoticed, and Nature will carelessly reclaim the ground that Art sought to take from her, but a desire for knowledge will persist forever as the strength-giving incentive to every action.

I turned and saw the island with its grove of poplars, and the tomb of Rousseau which no longer contains his ashes. Ah! Rousseau, we were too weak to avail ourselves of what you set before us ; we have forgotten what you taught our fathers, and we have wrongly interpreted your words, those last echoes of ancient wisdom. Still, we must take courage, and, as you did at the moment of your death, turn our eyes to the sun.

I saw the château surrounded by still waters, the cascade splashing down over the rocks, and the causeway joining the two parts of the village with its four dovecots. The lawn stretches away to a great length between steep, shady hills, and Gabrielle's tower is reflected in the flower-starred waters of the artificial lake ; little billows of foam press against the

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rocks beneath the cascade, and there is a monotonous hum of insects. The artificiality of the place repels me, and I hurry away across the sandy heath land, with its bracken and pink heather. How lonely and cheerless all these places are now, without Sylvie, and how delightful her childish joy made them seem to me years ago. I can recall her little cries as she ran here and there among the rocks and heather. With tanned skin and bare feet she was like a young savage, except for the straw hat whose broad ribbons streamed out behind with her black hair. We went to get some milk at the dairy farm, and the farmer said to me, "How pretty your sweetheart is, little Parisian!"

And she didn't dance with peasants then, you may be sure. She danced with me only, once a year, at the Festival of the Bow.

X

CURLY-HEAD

WHEN I reached Loisy, everybody was up and about. Sylvie had quite the air of a young lady, and her clothes were almost entirely in the style of the city. She took me upstairs with all her former artlessness, and her smile was just as captivating as ever, but the prominent arch of her eyebrows gave her a look of seriousness now and then. The bedroom was still quite simple, though the furniture was modern. The antique pier-glass had gone and in its place there was a mirror in a gilt frame, and above it a picture of a shepherd offering a bird's nest to a pink and blue shepherdess. The four-post bed, modestly hung with old flowered chintz, was now replaced by a walnut bedstead with a pointed canopy, and there were no more warblers in the cage by the window, but

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canaries. There was nothing of the past in this room, and my one idea was to leave it.

“Will you be making lace to-day?” I asked her.

“Oh, I don’t make lace any more, there’s no demand for it here; even at Chantilly the factory is closed.”

“What do you do then?”

For answer she produced from one of the cupboards a steel instrument that looked like a long pair of pliers, and I asked her what it was.

“It’s what they call ‘the machine’; with it you hold the skin of the glove in order to sew it.”

“Ah, then you make gloves, Sylvie?”

“Yes, we work here for the Dammartin trade, and it pays very well just now. Where d’you want to go? I’m not working to-day.”

I looked toward the Othys road, but she shook her head and I knew that her aunt was no longer alive. Then she called a little boy and told him to saddle the donkey.

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"I'm still tired from last night, but this will do me good. Let's go to Chaâlis."

The little boy followed us through the forest, carrying a branch, and Sylvie soon wanted to stop, so I urged her to rest a while, kissing her as I helped her to dismount. Somehow I could no longer bring our talk round to intimate matters, and was obliged to tell her of my travels and my life in Paris.

"It seems strange to go so far away."

"To see you again makes me think so too."

"Oh! that's easily said."

"And you must admit that you are prettier now than you used to be."

"I know nothing about that."

"Do you remember when we were children, how much bigger you were than I?"

"And I was the naughtiest too!"

"Oh, Sylvie!"

"And we were put in two baskets slung on the donkey's back."

"Do you remember showing me how to

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catch crayfish beneath the bridges over the rivers ? ”

“ And do you remember the day when your foster-brother pulled you out of the water ? ”

“ You mean Curly-head ! And it was he who told me I could wade across ! ” Then I hurried on to change the conversation. This incident vividly recalled the time when I had come there dressed in a little English suit, and all the peasants had laughed at me except Sylvie, who thought me magnificent. But I lacked the courage to remind her of her compliment of long ago, and the thought of the wedding clothes we had put on at Othys rose up in my mind, so I asked what had become of them.

“ Dear old Auntie, she lent me the dress to dance in at the Dammartin Carnival two years ago ; she died last year. ” And Sylvie wept so bitterly that I did not like to ask her how it was that she had gone to a masked ball. But I understood without asking when I remembered that, thanks to her trade of glove-maker,

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she was no longer a peasant. Her people were still as they had always been, but she was like an industrious fairy bringing ease and comforts to them all.

XI

THE RETURN

WHEN we came out of the wood we found ourselves among the lakes of Chaâlis. The slanting sun fell upon the little château which had sheltered the loves of Henry IV and Gabrielle, and it glowed red against the dull green of the forest.

“That’s a real Walter Scott landscape, isn’t it?” said Sylvie.

“And who told you about Walter Scott? You *have* been reading since I saw you three years ago! I want to forget books, and what gives me real pleasure is to revisit the old abbey where we used to play hide-and-seek together as little children. Do you remember how frightened you were when the keeper told us the story of the Red Monks?”

“Oh, don’t let’s talk about that.”

“Then you must sing me the song of the

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maiden who was carried off while walking by the white rose tree in her father's garden."

"One doesn't sing that song any more."

"Have you been studying music?"

"A little."

"Then I suppose you sing nothing but operatic airs now!"

"And why should you complain of that?"

"Because I love those old melodies and because you will forget how to sing them."

Sylvie then went through several bars of an air from a modern opera, phrasing them as she sang!

We walked past the pools and soon came upon the smooth green lawn edged by elms and lindens where we had danced so often. My conceit led me to mark out the old Carolingian walls for her and to decipher the coat of arms of the House of Este.

"And you talk to me of reading! See how much more you have read than I. You're quite a scholar." Her tone of reproach was irritating just when I had been waiting for a

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favourable moment to renew my entreaties of the morning. But what could I say to her, accompanied by a donkey and a very wide-awake little boy who never left us for a second, in order not to miss hearing a Parisian talk ? And then I was stupid enough to tell her of that unforgettable appearance of Adrienne at Chaâlis long ago ; we even went into the very room in the château where I had heard her sing.

“ If I could only hear your voice here beneath these arches, Sylvie, it would drive away the spirit that torments me, be it divine or the old bewitchment.”

Then she repeated after me :

Anges, descendez promptement

Au fond du purgatoire! . . .

“ What a gloomy song! ”

“ To me it's sublime ; it is probably by Porpora, and I think the words were translated in the sixteenth century.”

“ I'm sure I don't know,” said Sylvie.

We came back through the valley, taking

the Charlepont road which the peasants, naturally unversed in etymology, insist upon calling Châllepont. Sylvie, weary of the donkey, was walking beside me, leaning upon my arm. The road was deserted and I tried to speak the words that were in my mind, but somehow nothing but the most vulgar expressions occurred to me, or perhaps a pompous phrase from a novel that Sylvie might have read. Then, as we approached the walls of Saint S——, I surprised her with something quite classic, and fell silent for we were crossing water meadows and our path had to be carefully chosen among the interlacing streams.

“What’s become of the nun?” I said suddenly.

“How tiresome you are with your nun! . . . Well, that affair hasn’t turned out very well.” And this was all Sylvie would say about it.

I wonder whether women know when men are not speaking their true feelings? So often

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are they deceived, that it seems hardly possible, and many men act the comedy of love so cleverly! Though there are women who submit knowingly to deception, I could never bring myself to practise it, and besides, there is something sacred about a love that goes back to one's childhood. Sylvie and I had grown up together, almost as brother and sister, and to attempt to seduce her was unthinkable. Quite a different thought rose up in my mind!

Were I in Paris at this moment, I said to myself, I would be at the theatre. What will Aurelia (that was the actress' name) be playing in to-night? Surely the Princess in the new drama, and how pathetic she is in the third act! And the love scene in the second, with that wizened old fellow who plays the hero. . . .

"What are you meditating?" asked Sylvie, and then she began to sing:

*A Dammartin, l'y a trois belles filles:
L'y en a z'une plus belle que le jour . . .*

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“ Ah, that’s not fair,” I cried, “ you know plenty of those old songs! ”

“ If you came here oftener I would try and remember them, but it would take time. You have your occupation in Paris, and I have my work here. Don’t let’s be too late ; to-morrow I must be up at sunrise.”

XII

FATHER DODU

I WAS about to reply by throwing myself at her feet and offering her my uncle's house which I could still buy back, for there had been several heirs and the little estate was as yet undivided, but unhappily we had arrived at Loisy, where supper was being delayed for us. Onion soup proclaimed itself before we entered, and some of the neighbours had been invited to celebrate the day after the festival. I recognized Father Dodu at once, the old woodman who used to tell stories by the fire in the evenings. In his time, Father Dodu had been a shepherd, a messenger, a gamekeeper, a fisherman, and even a poacher, and in his leisure moments he made cuckoo clocks and turnspits. His present occupation was to show Ermenonville to the English, taking them to all the places where Rousseau had sat in meditation, and telling them about the

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philosopher's last days. It was Father Dodu who, as a little boy, had been employed by him to sort out his plants, and he had gathered the hemlock whose juice was to be squeezed into his cup of coffee. The innkeeper of the Golden Cross would never believe this last detail and consequently the old woodman had always hated him. It had long been grudgingly admitted that Father Dodu possessed several quite innocent secrets, such as curing sick cows by reciting a verse of the Scriptures backwards, and making the sign of the cross with the left foot. But he always disowned them, declaring that, thanks to the memory of his conversations with Jean-Jacques, he had long since abandoned superstitions.

"Have you come here, little Parisian, to corrupt our girls?"

"I, Father Dodu?"

"You take them into the woods when the wolf's not there!"

"You are the wolf, Father Dodu."

"I was, as long as I could find any sheep;

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now there are only goats and they can defend themselves. You Paris people are a bad lot, and Jean-Jacques was right when he said, '*L'homme se corrompt dans l'air empoisonné des villes.*' "

" You know only too well, Father Dodu, that men are corrupt everywhere." Whereupon the old man began a drinking-song which he finished in spite of our outcry against a certain filthy verse that we all knew it contained. We besought Sylvie to sing, but she refused, saying that one did not sing at table nowadays.

I had already noticed the youth who had been so attentive to her the night before, for he was sitting on her left, and there was something in his round face and dishevelled hair that was strangely familiar to me. He got up and came round behind my chair ; " Don't you recognize me, Parisian ? " And then the woman who had been waiting on us whispered in my ear : " Don't you remember your foster-brother ? "

SYLVIE

“ Oh, it’s Curly-head, of course,” I cried, thankful for the timely information, “ and you pulled me out of the water! ”

Sylvie burst out laughing at our meeting, and Curly-head continued, after kissing me, “ I didn’t know you had a beautiful silver watch in your pocket, and that you were much more anxious at its having stopped than you were about yourself; you said, ‘ The animal’s drowned, he doesn’t go tick-tack any more! Whatever will my uncle say ? ’ ”

“ So that’s what they tell little children in Paris!” said Father Dodu. “ Fancy an animal in a watch! ”

I thought Sylvie had forgotten me completely, for she started to go up to her room, saying she was sleepy, but as I kissed her good-night she said, “ Come and see us to-morrow.”

Father Dodu sat with us for a long time over a bottle of ratafia. Once he paused between two verses of a song he was singing and said, “ All men are the same to me. I

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drink with a pastry-cook as I would drink with a prince! ”

“ And where is the pastry-cook ? ” I asked.

“ This young man wants to go into the business.” Then Curly-head blushed, and I understood everything.

I was fated to have a foster-brother in this place made illustrious by Rousseau (Rousseau who reproved the use of wet-nurses!). Father Dodu told me that Sylvie would probably marry Curly-head, and that he wanted to open a confectioner's shop at Dammartin. I asked no more questions, and the next day the Nanteuil-le-Haudoin coach took me back to Paris.

XIII

AURELIA

TO Paris! . . . The coach would take five hours, but I only wanted to be there for the evening, and eight o'clock found me in my usual seat. The play, the work of a poet of the day, and faintly reminiscent of Schiller, owed much to Aurelia's inspired reading of her lines, and in the garden scene she was astonishing. She did not appear in the fourth act, and I went out to Madame Prevost's to buy her a bouquet. In it I put a very affectionate letter, signed *Un Inconnu*, saying to myself that I now had something settled for the future. The next morning I started for Germany. And why did I do this? To bring order into the confusion of my thoughts. If I were to write a novel about a man in love with two women at once, what chance would I have of getting it accepted? Sylvie had slipped away

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from me, and though I had no one to blame for this but myself, it had taken only a day to rekindle my love for her. Now she was for me a statue in the Temple of Wisdom, whose placid smile had caused me to hesitate at the edge of an abyss. And it seemed inconceivable to offer myself to Aurelia, to join that company of commonplace lovers who fluttered like moths into a consuming flame.

We shall see one day, I said, whether she has a heart or not, and it was not long before I read in the papers that Aurelia was ill. I wrote to her from the mountains of Salzburg, but my letter was so full of Germanic mysticism that I hardly expected it to have much success ; there could be no answer, for I had not signed my name, and I put my faith in Chance and . . . *l'Inconnu*.

Months went by while I was writing a poetic drama about the painter Colonna's love for Laura, whose family had placed her in a convent, and whom he had loved till the end of his days ; there was something in this subject

SYLVIE

akin to my own perplexities. When I had finished the last line I began to think about returning to France.

What can I say now that will not be the story of most of my fellow-beings ? I passed, circle by circle, into the Purgatory which we call the theatre ; “ I ate of the drum and drank of the cymbal,” as runs the senseless phrase of the initiates of Eleusis. It means, no doubt, that when the need arises one must go beyond the boundaries of nonsense and absurdity. For me it was a question of achieving my ideal and of making it permanent.

Aurelia accepted the leading part in the drama I had brought back with me from Germany, and I shall never forget the day when she let me read it to her. It was she who had inspired the love scenes, and consequently there was true feeling in my rendering of them. Then I disclosed the identity of *l'Inconnu* of the two letters, and she said, “ You are quite mad, but come and see me again. I am still

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waiting to find the man who knows how to love me."

Oh, Woman! Is it love you are seeking? And I? The letters I wrote her then must have been more exquisite and more moving than any she had ever received, but her replies did not exceed the limits of friendship. One day, however, her emotions were stirred, and she summoned me to her boudoir to tell me of an attachment from which it would be very difficult to extricate herself.

"If you really love me for myself," she said, "you will want me to be yours and yours only."

Two months later I received an effusive letter, and a few moments after reading it I was on my way to her flat. A friend whom I met in the street gave me this precious bit of information: the young man I had met at the club had just joined the Algerian cavalry.

The next summer Aurelia and her companions gave a performance at the Chantilly race meeting and I made myself as agreeable

SYLVIE

as possible to the manager. He had played Dorante in Marivaux's comedies and the lover's part in many dramas, and his latest success was in the play after the manner of Schiller, when he looked so wizened. At close range he seemed much younger, and being slender he was able to produce quite an effect in the provinces, for he still had plenty of vivacity. I had succeeded in getting him to give performances at Senlis and Dammartin, for I had become attached to the company as Chief Poet : he was at first in favour of Compiègne, but Aurelia had agreed with me. The following day, while they were dealing with the authorities and obtaining a theatre, I hired some horses and we rode out past the lakes of Comelle to have lunch at the Château of Queen Blanche. Dressed in her riding-habit, and with her hair streaming out in the wind, Aurelia rode through the wood like a queen of bygone days, to the great bewilderment of the peasantry, who had never seen anyone, since Madame de F——, so imposing or so

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gracious. After lunch we went to some neighbouring villages, so like those of Switzerland, with sawmills run by the waters of the Nonette. These places, full of precious memories for me, awakened only a mild interest in Aurelia, and even when I took her to the green lawn in front of the château near Orry, where I had first seen Adrienne, she was unmoved. So I told her how my love had been awakened by that slender figure bathed in mist and moonlight, and how, since then, that love had lived only in my dreams, now to be realized in her. She was gravely attentive, and when I had finished speaking she said, " You don't love me at all! You're only waiting for me to tell you that the actress and the nun are the same person. All you want is a drama, and the climax evades you. I've lost my faith in you completely! "

A flash of the truth came to me as she spoke. This extraordinary passion that had possessed me for so long, these dreams and these tears, this despair and this tenderness, perhaps it

SYLVIE

wasn't love at all ? But then where was love to be found ?

Aurelia played that evening at Senlis, and it seemed to me that she showed rather a fondness for the manager, the wizened lover. He was an extremely upright man, and he had been very useful to her. One day she spoke of him to me, " If you want to see someone who really loves me, there he is ! "

XIV

THE LAST LEAVES

SUCH are the vagaries that beguile and disturb the morning of life, and though there seems to be little order in what I have written here, I know there are those who will understand me. Illusions fall away from us one after the other, and experience is like a fruit that may not be tasted until the skin is removed. Its flavour is often bitter, but there is something invigorating in bitterness. (I hope these old phrases will be forgiven.)

Rousseau says that to look upon Nature is consolation for everything, and I sometimes go in search of my favourite grove at Clarens, lost in the mists to the north of Paris, but there is nothing there to stir my memory. All is changed.

Ermenonville!—where they still read Gess-

SYLVIE

ner's ancient idyl, translated for the second time—no longer will your twofold radiance fall upon me, blue or rose, like Aldebaran's elusive star ; now Adrienne, now Sylvie, the two objects of a single passion, an unachieved ideal and a sweet reality. Your shady groves, your lakes, and even your solitudes, what are they to me now ? Othys, Montagny, Loisy, your humble neighbours, and Chaâlis now being restored : they have kept nothing of the past. Sometimes the need rises up within me to revisit these places of silence and meditation, and sadly to evoke the fugitive memories of a time when my affectation was to be natural ; and I often smile on reading the once admired lines of Roucher cut into the surface of a rock, or a benevolent saying carved on a fountain or above the entrance to a grotto sacred to Pan. The ponds, dug out at such great expense, offer their leaden waters to the swans in vain, and the woods no longer echo with the horns of the Condé huntsmen or flash with the colour of their habits. To-day there

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is no direct road to Ermenonville; sometimes I go by Creil and Senlis, and sometimes by Dammartin.

I never go to Dammartin until evening, so I spend the night at the *Image Saint Jean*, where they give me a room with old tapestry upon the walls and a pier-glass hanging between the windows. Beneath an eiderdown coverlet, with which one is always provided in that part of the country, I sleep warmly, and in the morning, through an open window framed by vines and roses, I survey with delight a green expanse of twenty-five miles. The poplars look like lines of soldiers, and here and there villages shelter beneath their pointed church towers. First there is Othys, then Ève, then Ver; and I could find Ermenonville in the forest, if it had a tower, but in that retreat of philosophers the church has been neglected. I breathe deeply of this pure upland air, and set forth to the confectioner's shop.

“Hello, Curly-head!”

SYLVIE

"Hello, Little Parisian!" And after a friendly hand-clasp, I run upstairs to be welcomed by shouts of joy from the two children and by Sylvie's delighted smile. I say to myself, "Perhaps this is happiness! Still . . ."

I sometimes call her Lolotte, and though I do not carry pistols, for it is no longer the fashion, she thinks me a little like Werther. While Curly-head is occupied in getting the lunch ready, we take the children for a walk through the avenue of limes that encircles what is left of the old brick towers of the château, and while they are playing with their bows and arrows we read poetry or a page or two from one of those short books that are so rare nowadays.

I forgot to say that I took Sylvie to the performance at Dammartin, and asked her whether she thought Aurelia resembled someone she knew.

"Whom do you mean?"

"Don't you remember Adrienne?"

"What an idea!" she exclaimed, and burst

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out laughing, but then, as if in self-reproach, she sighed and said, "Poor Adrienne, she died at the Convent of Saint S—— about 1832."

EMILIE

MEMORIES OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

EMILIE

“**N**O one actually knows the story of Lieutenant Desroches who was killed last year at the battle of Hambergen, just two months after his wedding. If it was really suicide, may God forgive him! But surely, a man who sacrifices his life for his country deserves to have his action given a better name than that, whatever his motives.”

“That takes us back again to the question of compromising with conscience,” put in the Doctor. “Desroches was a philosopher who had had enough of life ; he wanted his death to be of some use, so he threw himself bravely into the conflict, and killed as many Germans as possible, saying to himself, ‘ This is the best I can do now, and I’m content to die.’ And when the blow fell that killed him, he shouted, ‘ *Vive l’Empereur!* ’ Ten soldiers from his company will tell you the same thing.”

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“ And it was no less a suicide for that,” replied Arthur, “ still, it would not have been right to refuse him church burial. . . .”

“ If you argue that way, you underrate the self-sacrifice of Curtius. That young Roman knight may have been ruined by gambling, unlucky in his love affairs, and tired of life, who knows ? But undoubtedly there is something fine about a man, who, when he has made up his mind to leave this world, wants his death to be of some use to others, and that is why it was not suicide in the case of Desroches, for suicide is the quintessence of egoism and calls forth the world’s disapproval. . . . What are you thinking about, Arthur ? ”

“ About what you said a moment ago—that Desroches killed as many Germans as he could before he died.”

“ Well ? ”

“ The appearance of those poor souls before God provided melancholy evidence of the splendid death of Lieutenant Desroches, and

EMILIE

I must say that it seems to me homicide as well as suicide."

"Oh, who would think of that? Germans are enemies."

"But does a man who has made up his mind to die have enemies? At that moment nationality disappears, and one thinks only of the other world, and of God as the only Sovereign. But the Holy Father listens and says nothing; still, I hope he will approve of what I am saying. Come, Father, give us your opinion, and try to bring us to an agreement. The question is a very difficult one, and the story of Desroches, or rather what the Doctor and I believe we know of it, appears to be no less complicated than the discussion it has produced between us."

"Yes," said the Doctor, "one is told that Desroches was greatly distressed by his last wound—the one that so terribly disfigured him—and it may be that he surprised a look of scorn or ridicule upon the face of the woman he had just married. Philosophers are

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easily offended. In any case, he died, and willingly."

"Willingly, if you insist upon it, but don't call the death one meets in battle suicide. That misinterpretation may be in your mind, but do not put it into words. One dies in a conflict because one encounters something that kills, not because one wishes to die."

"Then you want to call it fate?"

"My turn has come," said the priest, who had been lost in meditation during this discussion, "and you will perhaps think it strange of me to object to your paradoxes or your suppositions. . . ."

"Go ahead, by all means; you undoubtedly know more about it than we do. You've lived at Bitche for a long time, and we are told that Desroches knew you. For all we know, you may have been his confessor."

"If that were the case, I should have to keep silence. Unfortunately, Desroches confessed to no one, but you may take my word for it that his was a Christian death. I shall

EMILIE

tell you what caused it, and how it occurred, so that you will think of him as an upright man and a good soldier to the end. He died both for Humanity and for himself, and his death was according to the will of God.

“ Desroches joined a regiment when he was only fourteen, at a time when our republican army was being replenished with youthful recruits, most of the men having been killed on the frontier. He was as weak and slender as a girl, and it distressed his companions to see his fragile shoulders bend under the weight of his gun. You must have heard how permission was obtained from the Captain to have it cut down six inches. With his weapon thus suited to his strength, Desroches did splendid work in Flanders, and later on he was sent to Haguenau, where we, or rather you, were fighting for so long.

“ At the time of which I am going to speak, Desroches was at the height of his powers, and his services as ensign-bearer to the regiment were far greater than his rank or his flag would

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have led one to think, for he was practically the only man to survive two reinforcements. Twenty-seven months ago, he was made a lieutenant, after receiving a terrible face wound at Bergheim. The field-surgeons, who had often joked with him over the thirty battles he had come through without even a scratch, shook their heads when they saw him. 'If he lives,' they said, 'he'll always be weak-minded or perhaps insane.'

"The lieutenant was sent to Metz to recover, and a good many miles of the journey had been accomplished before he regained consciousness. After five or six months of the best possible care, he was able to sit up, and in another three he managed to open one eye. Then tonics were prescribed, and sunlight, and finally short walks. One morning, supported by two companions, he set out with spinning head and trembling limbs for the quai Saint-Vincent, close to the military hospital, and as he sat there at the edge of the promenade in the midday sun, the poor fellow

EMILIE

thought he was seeing the light of day for the first time.

“ He was soon able to walk by himself, and went every morning to the same bench on the promenade. His head was a mass of black taffeta bandages, all but covering his face, and he could always count on receiving a cordial greeting from the men who passed him, and a gesture of deep sympathy from the women. From this, however, he took small comfort.

“ But when he was seated in the warm sunlight, the mere fact of being alive in such pleasant surroundings after his terrible experience caused him to forget his misfortune. The dilapidated ramparts of the old fortress—a ruin since the time of Louis XVI—spread themselves out before him. The lindens were in flower, and they drew a thick line of shadow behind him. In the valley that dipped away from the promenade, the Moselle, overflowing its banks, kept the meadows of Saint-Symphorien green and fertile between its two arms. Then came the tiny island of Saulcy with its

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shady trees and cottages ; and finally the white foamy falls of the Moselle and its winding course sparkling in the sunlight. The Vosges mountains floated like billows of bluish mist at the extreme limit of his vision, and he gazed at them with ever increasing delight, his heart gladdened by the thought that there lay his own country—not conquered territory, but true French soil. These rich new provinces for which he had fought were uncertain acquisitions, like the loves we have won yesterday and will lose to-morrow.

“ In the early days of June, the heat was intense ; Desroches had chosen a bench, well in the shade, and it happened one day that two women came and sat beside him. He greeted them quietly and continued his contemplation of the surrounding country, but his appearance was so interesting that they could not help plying him with sympathetic questions.

“ One of the two was well advanced in years, and proved to be the aunt of the other, whose name was Emilie. The older woman

EMILIE

earned her living by doing gilt embroidery upon silk or velvet. You see, Desroches had questioned them in return and he learned that Emilie had left Haguenau to keep her aunt company, that she did church embroidery, and that she had been an orphan for some time.

“The next day found the bench similarly occupied, and by the end of the week the three were fast friends. Desroches, in spite of his weakness, and his humiliation at the attentions the young girl lavished upon him as though he were a harmless old man, was inclined to be lighthearted, and he ended by rejoicing in his unexpected good fortune instead of being distressed by it. Then always, on his return to the hospital, he remembered his terrible disfigurement—the prospect of going through life with the appearance of a scarecrow had caused him many hours of despair—but habit and his long convalescence had taught him to regard it with less apprehension.

“Certainly Desroches had never dared to take off the already useless dressing of his

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wound, nor to look at himself in the mirror, and the thought of doing so was now more terrifying than ever. However, he ventured to lift one corner of the taffeta, and found there a scar which was slightly pink, to be sure, but not at all repulsive. He then submitted his face to a further examination and discovered that the scar had not altered the shape of it, and that his eyes were as clear and healthy as ever. It was true that some hairs in his eyebrows were missing, but that was a small matter! The oblique stripe across his face, from forehead to ear, was . . . well, it was a sword cut received at Bergheim, and one knew from plenty of songs what a splendid thing it was to have such a distinction.

“Desroches was astonished to find that he was so presentable after the long months during which he had seemed a stranger to himself. He cleverly concealed the hair, turned grey by his wound, beneath the abundant brown on the left side, and drew out his moustache to as great a length as possible

EMILIE

along the line of his scar. Then on the following day he put on his new uniform and set forth triumphantly from the hospital. Those who passed him on his way to the gardens failed to recognize this sprightly young officer with tilted shako and a sword that jauntily slapped his thigh.

“ He was the first to arrive at the bench by the lindens and sat down with his customary deliberation, but in reality he was profoundly agitated and much paler than usual, in spite of the approval he had received from his mirror.

“ The two ladies soon put in an appearance, but they suddenly turned and walked away at the sight of a smart-looking officer sitting upon their accustomed bench. Desroches was deeply moved.

“ ‘ What ! ’ he exclaimed, ‘ you don’t recognize me ? ’

“ You mustn’t think that all this was the preface to one of those stories of pity that turns into love, like the plot of an opera. Desroches now had serious intentions ; he was

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glad to find himself once more considered eligible, and hastened to put the two ladies' minds at rest, for they seemed disposed to continue the three-cornered friendship. Their reserve gave way before his candid sincerity. The match was a suitable one from every point of view, and in addition, Desroches had a little property near Epinal. Emilie possessed a little house at Haguenau, inherited from her parents, which was let as a restaurant. This yielded an income of five or six hundred francs, which she divided with her brother Wilhelm, chief clerk to Schennberg, the notary-public.

“ When the arrangements were complete, it was decided that the wedding should take place at Haguenau, for it was really the young girl's home. She had only come to Metz to be with her aunt, and it was agreed that they should return there afterwards. Emilie was delighted at the prospect of seeing her brother again, and Desroches' astonishment was aroused by the fact that the young man was

EMILIE

not in the army with his contemporaries. Emilie told him her brother had been discharged on account of poor health, and Desroches was full of sympathy for him.

“ So the betrothed couple and Emilie’s aunt set forth one day for Haguenau ; they took places in the public conveyance that changed horses at Bitché. In those days it was simply a stage-coach of leather and wicker-work. The road, as you know, leads through beautiful country, and Desroches, who had only been along it in uniform, sword in hand, with three or four thousand other men, was now able to enjoy the solitude, the hills in their mantle of dark green foliage, and the fantastic shapes of the rocks that cut the sky-line. The fertile uplands of Saint-Avold, the factories of Sarreguemines, the thickly-wooded copses of Limb-lingue, where poplars, ashes and pines display the varying shades of their foliage from grey to dark green . . . you know what delightful scenery it is.

“ As soon as they had arrived at Bitché, the

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travellers went to the Dragon, and Desroches sent to the fortress for me. I joined him at once in order to make the acquaintance of his fiancée, and I complimented the young woman, whose rare beauty and charming manner impressed me greatly. I could see, too, that she was deeply in love with her future husband. The three lunched with me here, where we are sitting at this moment, and several officers, old friends of Desroches, who had heard of his arrival, came to the inn to beg him to stay for dinner at the restaurant near the fortress, where the staff took their meals. So it was agreed that the ladies should take themselves off early, and that the lieutenant should devote the last evening of his bachelorhood to his fellow officers.

“ The dinner was a lively affair, and every one enjoyed his share of the happiness and gaiety that Desroches had brought with him. They all spoke with enthusiasm of Egypt and Italy, and complained bitterly of the ill fortune that kept so many good soldiers garrisoned on the frontier.

EMILIE

“ ‘Yes,’ grumbled some of the officers, ‘the monotony of this life is wearing us out; we’re suffocating here. Might just as well be on a ship somewhere, as to live here without any fighting or distraction of any kind, or any chance of promotion. “The fort is impregnable.” That’s what Napoleon said when he passed through here to rejoin his forces in Germany ; to die of boredom is the only thing that can happen to us.’

“ ‘Alas! my friends,’ replied Desroches, ‘it was hardly more amusing in my time ; I complained of the life here as much as you do now. I had got my commission through devoting my whole mind to it, and the result was that I knew only three things : military drill, the direction of the wind, and as much grammar as one learns from the village schoolmaster. So when I was made second lieutenant and sent to Bitche with the second battalion of the Cher, I looked upon my stay here as an excellent opportunity for real uninterrupted study. With this in mind, I got some books, maps, and charts—I easily

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learned tactics, and German came naturally, for nothing else was spoken in this good French country—so that this time, so tedious for you who have so much less to learn, seemed to pass too quickly for me. At night I retired into a little room built of stone, beneath the great winding staircase ; there I lit my lamp and worked, with all the loopholes carefully stopped. One night . . .’

“ Here Desroches paused a moment, drew his hand across his eyes, emptied his glass, and continued his narrative without finishing the sentence.

“ ‘ You all know,’ he went on, ‘ that little path that leads up here from the plain below—the one they’ve made impassable by blowing up a huge rock and not filling up the hole it left—well, it was always fatal to hostile troops attacking the fortress; no sooner did the poor devils commence the ascent than they were subjected to the gunfire of four twenty-fours that swept the whole length of the path. I suppose those guns are still there.’

EMILIE

“ ‘ You must have distinguished yourself,’ put in one of the colonels. ‘ Was it there that you became a lieutenant ? ’

“ ‘ Yes, Colonel, and it was there I killed the one and only man I ever fought with hand to hand. That’s why it always distresses me to see this fort.’

“ ‘ What do you mean ? ’ they cried. ‘ You can’t expect us to believe that after twenty years of army life, fifteen pitched battles and perhaps fifty skirmishes, you’ve only killed one man.’

“ ‘ I did not say that, gentlemen ; I’ve rammed ten thousand cartridges into my gun, but for all anyone knows, half of them may have gone wide of their mark. In any case, at Bitche, I give you my word, my hand was first stained with the blood of an enemy, and my arm first drove the cruel point of my sword into a human breast.’

“ ‘ It’s true,’ interrupted one of the officers, ‘ that a soldier can kill many of his opponents without ever knowing it. Gunfire is not

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execution ; it's only the intention to kill. In the most disastrous charges, the bayonet plays but a small part ; ground is held or lost without close personal combat. Bayonets clash, and then disengage when resistance gives way. Mounted troops, for instance, do really fight hand to hand.'

" ' And so,' continued Desroches, ' just as one never forgets the last look of an adversary one has killed in a duel, his death-rattle, or the sound of his fall, so am I filled with remorse—laugh at me for it, if you will—by the ever-present vision of the Prussian sergeant I killed in the little powder magazine of this fort.'

" Everybody was silent, and Desroches went on :

" ' It was at night, and I was working as I have already told you. At two o'clock every one was asleep except the sentinels, and their duties were discharged in absolute silence, so that any noise was sure to rouse their suspicions. However, I kept hearing some sort

EMILIE

of disturbance in the long gallery beneath my bedroom ; then someone threw himself against a door and it began to crack. I ran out into the corridor and listened ; then I called to the sentinel in a low voice—no reply. In a moment or two I had summoned the gunners, jumped into my uniform, and was running in the direction of the noise, with my unsheathed sword in my hand. About thirty of us arrived simultaneously at the middle of the gallery where several passages meet, and, in the dim light of the lanterns, we recognized the Prussians, who had been treacherously admitted at the postern gate. They advanced in great confusion, and, on catching sight of us, fired several shots, which produced a terrific detonation, beneath those low-vaulted ceilings. We faced each other with rapidly increasing numbers, until it became difficult to move, but there was a space of six or eight feet between the two parties. We French were so surprised and the Prussians so disappointed that no one seemed to think of

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entering the lists, but this hesitation was only momentary. Extra torches and lanterns provided us with the necessary light—some of the gunners had hung theirs upon the wall—and a very old-fashioned kind of fighting took place. I was in the front rank, facing a tall Prussian sergeant covered with stripes and decorations ; the crowd was so thick that he had great difficulty in manipulating his gun . . . alas! how easily I recall these details! Perhaps it never entered his head to offer any resistance. I threw myself upon him, and plunged my sword into his noble breast; then his eyes opened wide and became fixed in a terrible stare, his fists clenched, and he fell into the arms of his comrades. . . . I don't remember what happened then; later, I found myself in the courtyard, drenched with blood. The Prussians had disappeared through the postern gate, and our gunfire accompanied them back to their encampment!'

“ After he had finished speaking, there was

EMILIE

a long silence, and then they talked of other things. The expression of sadness worn by those soldiers after they had heard of this seemingly ordinary misfortune, was very curious when you come to think of it, and one could tell just how much the life of a man was worth—even a German's life, Doctor—by examining the faces of these men whose profession was to kill."

"The spilling of human blood is a fearful thing, however it is done ;" replied the doctor, slightly surprised, "still Desroches did no wrong, for he was defending himself."

"Who knows ?" muttered Arthur. "You were talking a little while ago, Doctor, about compromising with conscience. Tell us now, wasn't the sergeant's death something approaching a murder ? Is it certain that the Prussian would have killed Desroches ?"

"But in a war, after all !"

"All right, yes, that was war. But we kill men at three hundred paces in the dim morning light—men who do not know us and can-

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not see us ; we face these men whom we do not hate, and kill them with anger blazing in our eyes. We comfort ourselves by saying it was a fair fight, and are proud of what we have done. It is held to be an honourable action by Christian people! ”

“ Bedtime came,” continued the priest, “ and Desroches was the first to forget his dismal story, for, from the room he had been given, he could see a certain window in the Dragon Hotel through the trees, where a night-lamp shone faintly. That room contained his future happiness, and when, in the middle of the night, he was awakened by the watchman making his rounds, he was oppressed and a little frightened by the consciousness that in case of danger his courage could no longer electrify him into action. The next day, before the firing of the morning gun, the guard captain opened a door for him and he found the two ladies waiting near the outer fortifications. I accompanied them as far as Neunhoffen, and they went on to Haguenau

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to be married at the Registrar's office, after which they were to return to Metz for the religious ceremony.

“ Emilie's brother Wilhelm welcomed Desroches cordially enough, and the brothers-in-law proceeded to take each the other's measure. Wilhelm was of medium height, and well put together; his blond hair was already very thin, as though too much study or a great sorrow had undermined his health, and he wore blue spectacles, for, as he said, his eyes were so weak that the slightest ray of light caused him pain. Desroches had brought a bundle of papers with him, to which Wilhelm gave his careful attention ; then the younger man produced the title-deeds to his family's property and insisted that Desroches should examine them, but since he had to deal with a man who was both trusting and unselfish, and was in love into the bargain, the investigation was not a long one. This seemed to flatter Wilhelm somewhat, so he began to take Desroche's arm when walking with him, offered

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him the use of one of his best pipes, and took him to see all his friends in Haguenau. After being presented to ten of them, with the usual accompaniment of smoking and much drinking of beer, Desroches begged for mercy, and from then on he was allowed to spend his evenings with his fiancée.

“ A few days later, the two lovers who had sat upon the bench beside the promenade were made man and wife by the Mayor of Haguenau. This worthy functionary must have been Burgomaster before the Revolution, and he had often held Emilie in his arms when she was a little child; it may even have been that he had even recorded her birth. The day before her marriage he whispered to her : ‘ Why don’t you marry a good German ? ’

“ Emilie did not seem to be concerned with matters of nationality, and the Lieutenant’s moustache no longer annoyed Wilhelm. At first, it must be admitted, there had been a decided coolness between the two men, but Desroches had made great concessions—Wil-

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helm, a few, for his sister's sake—and Emilie's aunt had hovered so effectually over all the interviews that there was now perfect agreement between them, and after the signing of the marriage settlements Wilhelm embraced his brother-in-law with a great show of affection. Before nine o'clock in the morning everything was in order, so the four travellers set out for Metz that very day. By six o'clock in the evening the coach drew up in front of the Dragon at Bitché.

“The roads in this country of woodland and interlacing streams are not easy to travel; there is at least one hill for every mile, and the occupants of the coaches usually get badly shaken up. This was probably the reason for the young bride's discomfort upon her arrival at the inn. Her aunt and Desroches stayed in the room with her, and Wilhelm, who was famished, went down to the little dining-room where the officers supped at eight o'clock.

“No one knew of Desroches' arrival this time, and the soldiers of the garrison had spent

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their day in the Huspoletden woods. He was determined not to leave his wife that evening, so he told the landlady not to mention his name to a soul. The three of them stood at the window watching the troops re-enter the fortress, and later, in the twilight, they saw the men in undress uniform, lined up before the canteen to receive their army bread and goat's-milk cheese.

“ Wilhelm, meanwhile, was trying to pass the time away and forget his hunger ; he lit his pipe and stood near the doorway where he could breathe in both the tobacco smoke and the smell of the cooking. When the officers caught sight of him, cap pulled down to his ears and blue spectacles constantly turned towards the kitchen, they concluded that he would be supping with them, and were anxious to make his acquaintance; he might have come from a distance, perhaps he was clever and would tell them amusing stories—this would be a great stroke of luck; then, if he proved to be from the neighbourhood, and

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likely to sit through the meal in stupid silence, they could enjoy poking fun at him.

“ A second lieutenant from the military school approached Wilhelm and questioned him with exaggerated politeness:

“ ‘ Good-evening, sir ; have you any news of Paris ? ’

“ ‘ No, have you ? ’ he replied quietly.

“ ‘ Good Lord, we never leave Bitche. How should we know anything ? ’

“ ‘ And I never leave my office.’

“ ‘ Are you in the Engineers ? ’

“ This pleasantry, directed at Wilhelm’s spectacles, delighted the officers.

“ ‘ I am clerk to a notary.’

“ ‘ Really ! That’s extraordinary at your age.’

“ ‘ Do you wish to see my passport ? ’

“ ‘ Certainly not.’

“ ‘ Very well. Now if you tell me that you’re not simply trying to make a fool of me, I’ll answer all your questions.’

“ A more serious tone then was adopted, and the lieutenant went on:

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“ ‘ I asked you, with the best intentions, whether you were in the Engineering Corps, because you wear spectacles. Don’t you know that the officers of that arm are the only ones who can wear them ? ’ ”

“ ‘ And does that prove that I am in the army ? ’ ”

“ ‘ But to-day everybody’s a soldier. You aren’t twenty-five yet ; you must be in the army, or perhaps you’ve got an income of fifteen or twenty thousand francs, or have parents who’ve made sacrifices for you, in which case you wouldn’t be eating here at this *table d’hôte*. ’ ”

“ ‘ I don’t know,’ said Wilhelm, shaking out his pipe, ‘ whether or not you have the right to question me like this, but in any case I shall answer you explicitly. I have no income, for I’m only a notary’s clerk, as I told you. I have been discharged from the army on account of my eyes. I’m nearsighted. ’ ”

“ This declaration was greeted by roars of laughter.

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“ ‘ Ah, young man, young man ! ’ cried Captain Vallier, slapping him on the shoulder, ‘ You’re quite right to make use of the proverb, “ It’s better to be a coward, and keep on living ! ” ’ ”

“ Wilhelm turned crimson. ‘ I’m not a coward, Captain, and I will prove it whenever you like. As to my papers, they are in order and if you are a recruiting officer I will show them to you. ’ ”

“ ‘ Enough, enough ! ’ exclaimed some of the officers, ‘ let him alone, Vallier ; he’s a harmless individual with a perfect right to eat here. ’ ”

“ ‘ Yes, of course ; well, let’s sit down and eat our supper. I meant no harm, young man. I’m not a surgeon, and this isn’t the examining room. Just to prove there isn’t any ill feeling, we’ll share a wing of this tough old thing they expect us to believe is a chicken. ’ ”

“ ‘ No, thanks, ’ said Wilhelm, whose appetite had vanished, ‘ one of those trout at the other end of the table will be enough for me. ’ ”

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And he motioned to the waiter to bring him the plate.

“ ‘ Are they trout, really ? ’ said the captain, watching Wilhelm remove his spectacles. ‘ Upon my soul, you’ve got better sight than I have ; look here, frankly, you could handle a gun as well as the next man . . . but someone’s interested in you, and you’ve made use of his influence ; quite right, too. You prefer a peaceful existence, and there’s no reason why you shouldn’t. But if I were in your place, it would make my blood boil to read in the Army Bulletins about young chaps of my age getting killed in Germany. Perhaps you aren’t French ? ’

“ ‘ No,’ said Wilhelm with an effort which, however, brought him great satisfaction, ‘ I was born at Haguenau ; I’m not French, I’m German.’

“ ‘ German ? But Haguenau is on this side of the Rhenish frontier ; it’s one of the finest villages of the French Empire. Lower Rhine Province. Look at the map.’

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“ ‘ I’m from Haguenau, I tell you ; ten years ago it was a German village. To-day it’s a French village, but I shall always be German, just as you would be French till the day of your death if your country ever belonged to Germany.’

“ ‘ Those are dangerous things to say, young man ; be careful.’

“ ‘ Perhaps it is wrong of me to say them,’ Wilhelm continued impetuously, ‘ and undoubtedly my feelings, if I cannot change them, ought to remain unexpressed. But, in carrying the matter so far, you force me to justify myself at any cost ; I do not wish to be taken for a coward. And now you know the motive which, to my mind, fully warrants my eagerness to make use of a very real infirmity, though it would not perhaps stand in the way of a man who was anxious to defend his country. You see, I do not hate the people you are fighting to-day. If it had been my misfortune to be obliged to take up arms against them, I suppose I too might be helping to lay

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waste German territory by burning villages and killing my countrymen—my former countrymen, if you prefer it—and who knows, who knows? might I not slay someone of my own flesh and blood, or some old friend of my father's, were he in the ranks of my pretended enemies?... surely, surely it is far better for me to busy myself with documents in a notary's office at Haguenau. And besides, there has been enough shedding of blood in my family; my father's—to the last drop, so you see . . .'

“ ‘ Your father was a soldier ? ’ interrupted Captain Vallier.

“ ‘ My father was a sergeant in the Prussian Army ; he was engaged for a long time in the defence of this territory you are occupying to-day, and he was killed in the last attack upon the fortress at Bitché.’

“ Everyone's interest was keenly aroused by Wilhelm's last words. A few minutes before, the general concern had been to refute his nonsense about his nationality.

“ ‘ Was it in '93 ? ’

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“ ‘ In ’93, on the seventeenth of November. My father had left Sirmasen the day before to rejoin his company. I know he told my mother that, by means of a daring scheme, this fortress would be taken without resistance. Twenty-four hours later he was brought back to us, dead. During the attack that took place that night, I afterwards learned, the sword of a young soldier had entered his breast, and thus fell one of the finest grenadiers of Prince Hohenlohe’s army. My father had made me swear to stay with my mother, but she died of grief a fortnight later.’

“ ‘ But someone’s just been telling us that!’ exclaimed the Major.

“ ‘ Yes,’ said Captain Vallier, ‘ it’s exactly the story of the Prussian sergeant killed by Desroches.’

“ ‘ Desroches!’ cried Wilhelm. ‘ Are you speaking of Lieutenant Desroches?’

“ ‘ Oh, no, no,’ replied one of the officers hastily, seeing that they were on the brink of some terrible revelation. ‘ The Desroches

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we're speaking of was a light infantryman from this garrison who was killed four years ago, the first time he went into action.'

" ' Ah, he's dead,' said Wilhelm, wiping the perspiration from his forehead.

" A few minutes later, the officers saluted and withdrew. Desroches watched their departure from the window above ; then he came down into the dining-room where he found his brother-in-law sitting at the long table with his head in his hands.

" ' Well, well, asleep already ? I'd like some supper. My wife's asleep at last, and I'm famished. Let's have a glass of wine. It'll put some life into us, and you're going to sit and talk to me, aren't you ? '

" ' No, I've got a headache. I think I'll go up to my room. By the way, those chaps told me a lot of interesting things about the fortress. Can't you take me up there to-morrow ? '

" ' Of course I can, my friend.'

" ' All right, I'll wake you in the morning.'

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“ When Desroches had finished eating, he sighed resignedly and went up to Wilhelm’s room, where a bed had been prepared for him—he had to sleep alone until after the religious ceremony had been performed. Wilhelm lay awake the night through, sometimes weeping silently, and sometimes glaring furiously at the sleeper, who was smiling in his dreams.

“ What we call presentiment is very much like the pilot fish that swims ahead of an enormous, half-blinded whale in order to bring it news of jagged rocks and sandy bottoms. We go through life so heedlessly, that certain of the more careless of our fellow beings would come hopelessly to grief without a moment’s thought for their soul’s salvation, if nothing ever ruffled the surface of their happiness. Some take warning from the raven’s flight, others for no apparent reason, and yet others there are who, upon waking, proceed with the greatest care if they have dreamed a sinister dream. All that sort of thing is presentiment. ‘ You are going to be in great danger,’ says the

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dream. 'Take care!' cries the raven. 'Be sad,' faintly murmurs the brain.

"Desroches had a peculiar dream towards the end of the night. He was in a cave beneath the earth ; a white figure was following him and its garments kept brushing against his heels. When he turned upon this figure it drew away and retired to such a distance that he could only see a tiny white spot. Presently this spot began to grow; it became luminous, and filled the whole cave with light. Then suddenly it went out. A slight noise was heard, and Wilhelm entered the room wearing his hat and a long blue cloak.

"Desroches woke up with a start. 'Good heavens! Have you been out already this morning?'

" 'You must get up,' said Wilhelm.

" 'But will they admit us at the fortress?'

" 'Certainly. All the soldiers but those on guard are out at drill.'

" 'Already? . . . Very well ; I'll be with

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you in a moment. Just give me time to say good-morning to my wife.'

" ' She's quite all right ; I've come from there. Don't concern yourself about her.'

" Desroches was rather surprised at this reply, but he put it down to impatience and yielded once more to an authority that he would soon be able to shake off.

" On the way to the fortress, he looked back at a window in the inn :

" ' Emilie is probably asleep.'

" But the curtain moved, and was drawn across the window, and Desroches thought he saw someone step back into the centre of the room in order to avoid being seen by him.

" They gained admittance to the fortress without difficulty. A disabled captain, who had not supped at the Dragon the evening before, was in command of the outpost, and Desroches asked for a lantern and proceeded with his silent companion on their tour of inspection.

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“ After stopping at several places of interest to which Wilhelm paid small attention, he asked, ‘ Aren’t you going to show me the underground passages ? ’

“ ‘ Certainly, if you like, but I assure you it will be most unpleasant. The dampness down there is terrible. There is gunpowder stored under the left wing, and we cannot visit those places without a special permit; on the right are the water mains and the raw saltpetre, and in the centre the countermines and underground passages. Do you know what a vault is like ? ’

“ ‘ Oh, that doesn’t matter. I’m curious to see where so many disastrous encounters have taken place, where you yourself, I am told, have been in mortal danger.’

“ ‘ I’m to be spared nothing,’ thought Desroches ; then he said : “ All right, come along, brother, this passage leads to the postern.’

“ The light from the lantern flickered dismally upon the mouldy walls, and its reflection

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was caught here and there by sword blades and gun-barrels.

“ ‘ What weapons are these ? ’ asked Wilhelm.

“ ‘ They belonged to the Prussians who were killed at the last attack ; my companions have hung them here as trophies.’

“ ‘ Then there were several Prussians killed here ? ’

“ ‘ A great many encountered death where these passages meet.’

“ ‘ Didn’t you kill a sergeant here, a tall elderly man with a red moustache ? ’

“ ‘ I did. But haven’t I told you that story ? ’

“ ‘ No, you haven’t, but last night in the dining-room I learned of this exploit which your modesty has kept from us.’

“ ‘ What can be the matter, brother ; why are you so pale ? ’

“ ‘ Don’t call me brother, but enemy ! Look ! I am a Prussian. I am the son of the sergeant you murdered ! ’

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“ ‘ Murdered! ’

“ ‘ Or killed ; it doesn’t matter. There’s where your sword entered his breast.’

“ Wilhelm threw back his cloak and pointed to a tear in his father’s green uniform, which he had reverently kept and was now wearing.

“ ‘ You—the son of that sergeant! For God’s sake tell me you’re only joking! ’

“ ‘ Joking ? Does one make jokes about a foul deed like that ? . . . Here, my father was killed; his noble blood reddened these stones . . . perhaps this was his very sword! . . . Take down another of them, and give me my revenge! . . . Come, this is not a duel; a German is fighting a Frenchman! *En Garde!* ’

“ ‘ But, my dear Wilhelm, this is madness! Put away that rusty sword. Do you wish to kill me if I am blameless ? ’

“ ‘ And if you live you will have my blood as well as his. Come, defend yourself! ’

“ ‘ Wilhelm! Kill me as I am, unarmed; I too am going mad. My head’s spinning. Wilhelm! I did what every soldier must do.

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Think, think! . . . And besides, I am your sister's husband ; she loves me. Oh, no! It's impossible!'

" ' My sister! . . . Yes, and there you have the reason why both of us cannot remain alive on this earth! She knows everything, and will never again see the man who made her an orphan. Your parting from her yesterday was final.'

" Desroches uttered a cry of rage, and rushed at Wilhelm to disarm him ; the struggle was a prolonged one, for the younger man's strength was born of desperation, and a bitter hatred which had at last found its object.

" ' Give me that sword, you fiend; give it to me!' cried Desroches. ' I will not die at the hands of a madman!'

" ' That's how it is,' Wilhelm retorted in a stifled voice, ' kill the son where you killed the father; and the son is a German, too . . . a German!'

" At that moment footsteps were heard, and

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Desroches relinquished his efforts. Wilhelm was at the end of his strength.

“Those footsteps were mine, gentlemen. Emilie had come to the presbytery and had told me everything, in order to put herself under the protection of the church. I kept back the words of pity that rose to my lips, and when the poor child asked me whether she might continue to love her father’s murderer, I was silent. When she took my hand and said good-bye, there were tears in her eyes, and I knew that she understood. Then an idea of what might be happening entered my mind, and I followed her to the inn, where she was told that her brother and husband had gone together to the fortress. I hurried off after them, fully convinced of the horrible truth, and fortunately I arrived in time to prevent these two men, maddened by rage and grief, from enacting a further tragedy.

“Although disarmed, Wilhelm remained unmoved by the pleadings of Desroches ; he was beaten, but the full force of his anger still

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blazed in his eyes. I reproached him with his obstinacy: 'It is you,' I said, 'who are causing the dead to cry for vengeance, and you alone would be the cause of this dreadful thing. Aren't you a Christian? Do you wish to divert the course of Divine Justice? Are you prepared to go through life with a murder on your conscience? There will be atonement for the other deed, be assured of that, but it is not for us to force it!'

"Desroches took my hand and said: 'Emilie knows everything; I will never see her again, and I know what I must do to give her back her freedom.'

" 'What are you saying?' I cried; 'do you mean suicide?'

"At this word, Wilhelm grasped Desroches' hand.

" 'No,' he said, 'I am the only offender. I should have borne my suffering in silence.'

"I will not attempt to describe the agony we went through on that tragic morning; I used every argument that my religion and my

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philosophy suggested, but my efforts to provide an acceptable way out of that cruel situation were of no avail ; a separation was inevitable in all cases, but what grounds for this could be stated in court ? Not only would the case be a most painful one for all concerned, but there was a political danger in allowing the wretched business to be known.

“ I devoted myself to the task of defeating Desroches’ sinister intentions, and endeavoured to create in his mind a religious antipathy to the crime of suicide. You see, the poor fellow had been brought up on eighteenth century materialism. Since his wound, however, his ideas had changed greatly, and he had become one of those half-sceptical Christians—we have so many of them—who have concluded that a little religion can do no harm after all, and who will make the concession of consulting a priest in case there may be a God. It was an undefined belief such as this that enabled him to listen to my comforting words.

“ Some days passed ; Wilhelm and his

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sister remained at the inn, for Emilie's health had not withstood the shock she had received. Desroches was with me at the presbytery, where he spent his days in reading the religious books I had put at his disposal. One day he went alone to the fortress and spent several hours there ; on his return he showed me a sheet of paper with his name upon it : a captain's commission in a regiment on the point of departure to rejoin the Partouneaux division.

“ In about a month we received the news of his heroic death, and whatever may have been the mad impulse that sent him into the thick of the fighting, one felt that his bravery had been a splendid example to the whole battalion, which had sustained heavy losses in the first charge.”

The narrative was at an end and the listeners remained silent, their minds absorbed by what they had heard of the life and the death of this man. Then the priest rose from his seat :

“ If you have no objection to a change in the

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direction of our evening walk, gentlemen, we can follow that line of poplars, glowing in the last rays of the sun, and I will take you to the Butte-aux-Lierres. From there we can see the cross of the convent within whose walls Madame Desroches sought refuge."

OCTAVIE
OR
THE ILLUSION

OCTAVIE

IN the spring of 1835, a keen desire to see Italy took possession of me. Every morning upon waking I imagined myself breathing in the sharp fragrance of Alpine chestnut trees ; at evening, the cascade at Terni and the foaming source of the Teverone gushed forth for me only, as I sat facing the shabby stage of a little theatre. . . . Sweet siren voices murmured in my ears, and it seemed to me that the rushes of Trasimene were speaking. . . . There was nothing for it, so I left Paris to search for distraction from a frustrated love.

I broke my journey at Marseille, and each morning I went down to the Château Vert to bathe in the sea and watch the little laughing islands far out in the gulf. A young English girl was my companion by those shores, and we swam together, her slender body cutting

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the green waters. This daughter of the sea, who was called Octavie, came triumphantly to meet me one morning, filled with pride at a strange catch she had made. In her white hands she held a fish, and she gave it to me. I could not help smiling at such a gift.

However, I resolved to continue my journey, and I went by land, for there was cholera about and I wished to avoid being quarantined. I saw Nice, Genoa and Florence; I was filled with admiration for the Duomo, the Baptistry, the masterpieces of Michael-Angelo, and Pisa's leaning tower and Camp Santo. Then I journeyed to Rome, by way of Spoleto, and there for ten days I gazed upon Saint Peter's dome, the Vatican and the Coliseum, as though in a dream; then on to Civita-Vecchia by post-stage to take ship again. For three days the fury of the sea prevented the arrival of my steamer, and once while wandering sadly along the desolate shore, I barely escaped being attacked by dogs. The day before my departure, a French vaudeville performance was

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given at one of the theatres, and I noticed at once the light hair and vivacious manner of Octavie. She was sitting in a stage-box with her father, who seemed very feeble—his doctors had recommended the climate of Naples.

The next morning I set out joyfully for the quai, bought my passage and found Octavie pacing the deck with long strides and digging her little white teeth into the skin of a lemon to show her impatience at the intolerable delay.

“Poor child,” I said, “your lungs are weak, I’m sure of it, and that is not good for you.”

She looked at me fixedly and asked, “Who told you that?”

“The Tiburtine sibyl,” I replied solemnly.

“Oh, come now, I don’t believe a word you say!” As she spoke, she looked at me tenderly, and I could not help kissing her hand. “If I were cleverer, I would teach you how to lie!” And she laughingly shook her little gold-headed cane in my face.

We crossed the bay of Naples, between

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Ischia and Nisida glowing in the sun, and as we drew near the quai, she said : “ If you love me, you will wait for me to-morrow at Portici, and, you know, I’m not in the habit of making engagements like that.”

She went with her father to the new Hôtel de Rome on the place du Môle near the quai, and I took lodgings behind the Théâtre des Florentins. My day was spent in sauntering about the square, up and down the rue de Tolède, and in visiting the Musée des Études. In the evening I went to the ballet at San Carlo, where I met the Marquis Gargallo, a Paris acquaintance, and after the performance we went together to drink tea with his sisters.

I shall never forget the charming evening that followed ; the Marquise received her guests—mostly foreigners—in a lofty reception room ; people talked a little like the *Précieuses*, and I imagined myself in the blue room at Rambouillet. The sisters of the Marquise were as beautiful as the Graces, and I felt the enchantment of ancient Greece.

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Then followed a long discussion upon the shape of the Eleusinian Stone—was it triangular or square?—and the Marquise might have pronounced the final judgment, for she had the beauty and the nobility of Vesta. When I left the palace, my head was so dizzy with philosophical phrases, that I was unable to discover my lodgings, and, being thus obliged to wander about the city, I was destined to be the hero of an adventure of some kind. That evening's encounter is the subject of the following letter, written some years afterwards, to her from whom I had believed I could escape by leaving Paris:

“ To live through four days without seeing you for a moment alone has been a terrible suspense, and my mind is filled with grievous apprehension. I believe in your sincerity, but I feel there has been a change in you lately. In Heaven's name put an end to my doubts, unless you wish some misfortune to befall us. You see it is I who have been at fault. I was

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timid, for no man could allow such passion as mine to become apparent. I put such restraint upon my love—so great was my fear of offending a second time—that I was perhaps too careful and you may have misconstrued my coolness. It was a day when you were in great difficulty, so I controlled the tumult of emotions within me, and put on a mask of smiles to hide the consuming fires of my emotion. Others have been less careful, but none of them has shown such true affection for you, or so completely understood all that you hold worth while.

“ Let us be frank with each other: I know that every woman has ties which can only be broken with difficulty, troublesome relationships that take time to bring to an end. Have I asked you to sacrifice too much ? Tell me what it is that troubles you ; I promise you my sympathy. Your fears, your caprices, and the requirements of your position could never lessen my affection for you, nor stain the purity of my love. Together we shall see what prob-

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lems there are to be met, and you can count upon me if there are any knots that may not be untied, but must be cut. It would be cruel not to be frank with me now, when I have told you that my life is yours. You cannot help knowing that my greatest desire is to die for you.

“ To die! Good God! Why does this idea present itself at every turn, as though death were as much to be desired as the happiness you promise me? Death! And yet the word does not fill my mind with melancholy thoughts. I have seen her after a banquet, wearing a crown of pale roses; I have dreamed that she was standing with a smile upon her face at the bedside of some adored woman, after the raptures and the madness of love were ended, and that she said to me:

“ ‘ Now, Young Man, you have had your share of this world’s delights. Come and sleep in my arms. I am not beautiful, but I am kind and you have need of my help. I cannot give

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you the pleasures of love, but everlasting peace.'

"But where had this vision already appeared to me? Ah, yes, it was at Naples, as I told you, three years ago. I met her at night near the Villa Reale; she was young and amazingly like you, and she earned her living by doing embroidery for the Church. We walked towards her lodging, and I saw that she was very unhappy, though she mentioned having a lover in the Swiss Guards. He might come to see her that very night . . . but I soon discovered that I attracted her more than he did. What shall I say to you? It pleased my fancy that night to forget myself, and to imagine that she, whose language I could scarcely understand, was yourself—that some magic power had brought you to me. Why should I conceal this experience from you and the illusion that so easily took possession of me, especially after several glasses of *Lacrima Christi*? The room where she lived had something mystical about it; perhaps it was only a

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chance atmosphere ; or was it produced by the singular furnishings ? A black Madonna, covered with tinsel, stood upon a chest of drawers by a bed with green twill curtains—my hostess had been entrusted with the task of restoring the figure's ancient attire. In another part of the room, a statue of Saint Rosalie, crowned with purple roses, seemed to be watching over a cradle containing a sleeping infant. Upon the whitewashed walls hung some old pictures of mythological divinities representing the four elements : everywhere a brilliant confusion of coloured stuffs, artificial flowers, Etruscan vases, and tinsel-framed mirrors gleaming with the reflection of a large copper lamp. Upon a table I saw a treatise on Divination and Dreams which made me think that perhaps my companion was a sorceress, or at least a gipsy.

“ An old woman with a big solemn face, who must have been her mother, waited upon us, and I sat gazing in thoughtful silence at

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her whose features completely reminded me of yours.

“ ‘ Something is troubling you ? ’ she kept asking me.

“ ‘ Don’t talk to me,’ I replied, ‘ for I can scarcely understand you ; it tires me to carry on a conversation in Italian.’

“ ‘ Oh, I don’t have to talk Italian,’ she said, and suddenly I found myself listening to a language I had never heard before, full of sounds that were resonant and guttural, and interspersed with charming little bird-notes—a primitive language without doubt—perhaps Hebrew, perhaps Syriac, I could not tell. She smiled at my astonishment, and took from the chest some bracelets, necklaces, and a crown, which were set with imitation jewels; then she put these on, and came back to the table, where she sat for a long time without speaking. When the old woman returned and saw her like this, she burst out laughing, and told me, I think, that she attended festivals in this attire. Then the infant began to cry, whereat

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both women ran to the cradle, but the younger one soon came back to me, carrying the pacified *bambino* proudly in her arms.

“ In that delightful unknown tongue, she coaxed and charmed the infant to silence, whilst I, little used to the potent wines of Vesuvius, sat watching the objects in the room float past me. With her strange mannerisms, her regal adornment, her pride and her whimsicality, she made me think of one of those Thessalian enchantresses who offer dreams in return for souls. Oh, why am I not afraid to speak to you of this? . . . It is because you must know that it too was a dream, a dream evoked by you, and you alone.

“ I fled from this apparition, at once alluring and terrifying, and wandered through empty streets until the early church-bells began to ring. Then I left the city, following a succession of narrow alleys back of Chiaia, and proceeded to climb the Posilipo Hills above the grotto. From these heights I looked out across the sea, already blue, and

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down into the city, barely stirring from its slumbers. The sun was just beginning to gild the tops of the villas on the islands in the bay. Sorrow was far from my thoughts then, and I walked rapidly with long steps; I lay down and rolled in the dewy grass, but the idea of Death was in my heart.

“ Oh, God! what misery it was, what torture to know that one was not loved! I had seen the ghost of happiness; I had made use of every divine gift. Nature’s most splendid spectacle was spread out before me, beneath a sky of incomparable beauty, but I was four hundred leagues from the one woman in the world, and my existence was nothing to her. Not to be loved, and to have no hope of ever being loved : that was what tempted me to go and stand before God, and to ask why He had condemned me to this lonely life. Only one step was necessary from the spot where I stood, at the edge of the cliff—I heard the murmur of the clear blue waters below me—there would be only a moment of pain. A

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terrible dizziness followed ; twice an unknown power frustrated my attempts to throw myself over the edge, and I fell back each time clutching wildly at the earth. Ah, no! Thou didst not create me to suffer all the days of my life, and I will not outrage Thee by my death. But grant that I may acquire the resolution by which some gain Power, others Fame, and yet others, Love."

Towards the end of that fantastic night, a rare phenomenon occurred. The heavens were illuminated, and a hot sulphurous dust came in at the windows. I could scarcely breathe, and, leaving the companion who had yielded to my will asleep upon the balcony, I set out in the direction of the Castel Sant' Elmo. Dawn found me climbing the mountain, and breathing deeply of the pure morning air. Then I lay down to rest in the pleasant shelter of a vine-arbour, and to gaze without alarm at Vesuvius beneath its canopy of smoke.

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Then came the dizziness of which I have spoken, but the thought of the rendezvous I had with the young English girl prevented me from carrying out my fatal intentions. After the cooling refreshment of an enormous bunch of grapes purchased from a market-woman, I started for Portici, and went to see the ruins of Herculaneum. The streets were powdered with metallic ashes, and I descended into the subterranean city ; there I wandered from house to house, asking of each the secret of its past. The temples of Venus and Mercury would have stirred my imagination, had they been peopled with figures that lived and moved. . . . At Portici I sat down thoughtfully beneath an arbour to wait for my new friend, and before very long she appeared, guiding her father's feeble steps. She grasped my hand firmly, and said :

“ I'm glad you've come.”

We took a carriage to Pompeii, and what a delight it was to lead her through the silent streets of that ancient Roman colony! I had

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made myself familiar with its most secret passages. When we came to the little temple of Isis, my readings from Apuleius enabled me to give her a faithful account of the rites and ceremonies of the cult. Then it took her fancy to play the part of the Goddess, and I undertook the rôle of Osiris and the elucidation of the Divine Mysteries.

On the way back, my mood, produced by the exalted thoughts with which our minds had been occupied, made it impossible for me to speak to her of love, and my detachment was so marked that she reproached me with it. So I confessed that I felt myself to be no longer worthy of her, and told her of the strange apparition which had rekindled an old love in my heart, and of the distress that came after that fateful night when the ghost of happiness had appeared to remind me of a broken pledge.

Alas! How far away it all seems! Ten years ago I passed through Naples on my return from the Orient, and found that Octavie was still at the Hôtel de Rome ; she

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was married to a famous painter, who had been stricken with total paralysis soon after the wedding. He was still young, and without hope of ever being cured: a motionless figure upon a bed, lifeless but for two large restless black eyes. The poor girl's existence was entirely devoted to the care of her husband and her father, but all her sweetness and candour had not calmed the sick man's morbid jealousy, and nothing would induce him to allow her any freedom. He reminded me of the black giant who watches unceasingly in the Cave of the Spirits, and whose wife must beat him lest he fall asleep. Ah! the mystery of human life! That one should find here the cruel traces of the vengeance of the gods!

I had only a day in which to contemplate this sorrow. When I took ship for Marseille, her sweet memory haunted me, and I felt that I had turned my back upon happiness. Octavie kept the secret of it.

THE END



LONDON : CHARLES WHITTINGHAM AND GRIGGS (PRINTERS), LTD.
CHISWICK PRESS, TOOKS COURT, CHANCERY LANE.